Part of the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

An Oral History Interview with FRANCIS S. O'BRIEN

Interview by Timothy Naftali
September 29, 2011
New York City

The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum
18001 Yorba Linda Boulevard
Yorba Linda, California 92886
(714) 983-9120
FAX: (714) 983-9111
nixon@nara.gov
http://www.nixonlibrary.gov

Descriptive Summary

Scope and Content

Biographical Note

Administrative Notes

About the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

The Richard Nixon Oral History Project was created in November 2006 at the initiative of Timothy Naftali to preserve the memories and reflections of former Nixon officials and others who had been prominent in the Nixon era by conducting videotaped interviews. Naftali insisted from the project's inception that it be a serious, impartial and nonpartisan source of information about President Nixon, his administration, and his times. A second goal of the project was to provide public domain video that would be available as free historical content for museums and for posting on the Internet. Donors to the project neither requested nor received a veto over interview questions or interviewee selection. Accordingly, the project includes interviews with former staff members of the Nixon administration as well as journalists, politicians, and activists who may have been opposed to the Nixon administration and its policies. Taken as a whole, the collection contributes to a broader and more vivid portrait of President Nixon, the Nixon administration, and American society during the Nixon era.

Copyright and Usage

Francis O'Brien has donated his copyright in this interview to the United States government with no restrictions.

Suggested Citation

Francis O'Brien recorded interview by Timothy Naftali, September 29, 2011, the Richard Nixon Oral History Project of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

Duplication Services

Contact the Richard Nixon Presidential Library for information about duplication of DVDs and original master tapes.

Disclaimer

Oral history interviews are expressions of the views, memories, and opinions of the person being interviewed. They do not represent the policy, views, or official history of the National Archives and Records Administration.

The following is a transcript of an Oral History Interview conducted by Timothy Naftali with Francis S. O'Brien on September 29, 2011 in New York, NY.

Naftali: Hi. I'm Tim Naftali. I'm director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library & Museum in Yorba Linda, California. It's September 29, 2011 and I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing Francis O'Brien for the Nixon Oral History Program. Mr. O'Brien, thanks for doing this.

O'Brien: You're welcome.

Naftali: Let me give the viewer a sense of what you were doing before you started working with Congressman Rodino. Tell us about your work please with John Lindsay?

O'Brien: I got recruited. I was from Ohio. I was in a small town in Ohio, Sandusky, Ohio. I first started out as a school teacher actually in Washington D.C. at Anacostia High School and then I wanted to change things around and was lucky enough through my brother, actually, who was working in New York to get interviewed and to be hired by John Lindsay, by the John Lindsay administration to be on a crisis task force.

That's an odd position for somebody from a small town in Ohio to deal with in those days a lot of disruptions in the various communities. I was assigned to Brooklyn and a lot of community boards. There was a lot of disruption in the schools, in the communities and we, John Lindsay had this plan that if he sent his folks out to mediate these conflicts, you could get there before the police. It was an extraordinary experience, obviously for someone like myself and we dealt with school disruptions. We dealt with community disruptions.

At one time, there were five prisons in Manhattan and the city of New York that were taken over by the prisoners. I was assigned two guards to negotiate with a team. This is all way beyond any of the life experience I had before then. That was my John Lindsay and then I was with the housing agency at one time for a short time before I went to Washington to work for Congressman Rodino.

Naftali: How did you get recruited to work for Congressman Rodino?

O'Brien: Through a friend. A friend of his knew me and they called me one day and said Congressman Rodino is looking for a Chief of Staff. Would you like to go down and meet with him? I did. I went down

to meet with him. I didn't have Washington experience or Hill experience. We had this conversation.

I'm sure others will tell you, Congressman Rodino is not the most forthcoming person in a conversation. You were never quite sure what he was saying to you, so when I left the interview I had no idea. Did it go well, not well? Was I hired, not hired? Turns out I was hired right in the interview. That's how the job came about.

Naftali: Was this interview about the time of the Agnew proceedings?

O'Brien: Before. This was probably in the spring of '73 or around that time, because I started when Congress was in recess. I come to Washington and the Congressman's not here, because they're all in recess in August. All of a sudden, the Agnew story broke and I'm sort of in Washington and my first experience is all the stories of Spiro Agnew, Vice President Agnew, started coming out. That was sort of my first weeks in Washington D.C. was starting with the Agnew situation.

Naftali: Do you remember the day that Agnew came to the House?

O'Brien: I certainly do.

Naftali: Could you tell us about that?

O'Brien: I thought he was one of the most handsome men I ever met. That was sort of an odd impression. He's very tall, very stately. I was kind of getting impressions of people. I saw Katie Couric. We were on the plane. I was thinking she's not as tall as I thought. But anyway, he came to the House and he came to the office and we were all sitting there.

He was very dignified and very stately. It was sort of my first time of meeting such a high-ranking member of the government. It was a visual impression I had that day separate from what we were going to do in terms of the interviewing process. That was my first impression as I remember him back all these years.

Naftali: Do you remember, I mean again it's a long time ago, do you remember some of the challenges that Congressman Rodino faced regarding the Agnew process?

O'Brien: We faced challenges. He faced challenges from day one. Remember he came to the Chairmanship after a 50-year reign of Manny Celler who was in those days one of the most important

people in the civil rights movement, head of the Judiciary Committee, and had been a member of Congress for 50 years. He wasn't the chairman then, but for many, many years and was one of the giants of the House, obviously.

Through this fluke election of this Holtzman out in Brooklyn, we're used to those now, those kinds of upsets, she upset this icon. This fairly unknown sort of party line congressman from New Jersey is all of a sudden put into this position. So there were challenges all around which obviously we'll talk about more as we get into the thing. We didn't know what to do. This was all uncharted territory.

Here is the Vice President of the United States being accused of serious issues and the word impeachment started to come up. This is something that none of us, certainly I had no knowledge of this, and no members of the Judiciary Committee had any knowledge of this or was it ever part of conversations or anything. There was a lot of scurrying. There was a lot of staff, I remember, just trying to put things together. How do you question the Vice President? What do you talk about? What's our jurisdiction?

I remember all of that going around, because I'm not a lawyer. There were things I was not involved in on the legal side, but clearly as we'll talk later these are political events, not legal events in the sense when the House and the Senate deals with impeachment or that these are at the core, because these are political solutions. There were a lot of political discussions sort of behind closed doors, separate from Vice President Agnew or later President Nixon on what's our role? What do we do? How do you?

Of course, the environment, not unlike today, was extremely partisan. President Nixon was a very divisive figure. In other words, there was pro-Nixon, anti-Nixon; we're right in the middle of a war. I mean, they were very challenging times. Turn this around, coming out of the '60s and the early '70s. That's basically all I remember from, it's all impressionistic from Vice President Agnew.

Naftali: In the interviews we did with former members of the White House staff, there was a sense, there was a fear in October of 1973 of a double impeachment, that both Agnew and President Nixon would be impeached and Carl Albert would become President.

O'Brien: There was a lot of that talk. Of course, that wasn't reality. You dealt, remember the House at that was in my own experience you

had very liberal members, the members of Congress was representing feelings of parts of the country, with really strong feelings towards President Nixon and Vice President Agnew and clearly there was conversations about this, but when you got to the core of the leadership of the House including Congressman Rodino, the talk just sort of dissipated.

Naftali: There's nothing in the Constitution that mandates this. How did the leadership in the House decide the Judiciary Committee would be responsible for the impeachment inquiry?

O'Brien: It was a much debated issue and from my recollection this was a Tip O'Neill decision in the end. First of all, there was the constitutional issue of what's the correct mechanism within the House? Do you go through the Judiciary Committee? Do you set up a special committee? There was all these discussions. Looming over this was Peter Rodino. A lot of these discussions would not have taken place, I don't believe, if Manny Celler had still been the head of the Judiciary Committee, because of his historic stature.

This is an unknown entity, Peter Rodino, and at the time not particularly well thought of. I mean people did that. People liked Peter Rodino, but he was machine politician out of Newark, New Jersey who followed party lines and was very quiet, was not a forceful figure. You had a legal issue within the House of how do you deal with this issue. Then there was the issue of the actual human beings who would and this was an intensely discussed issue.

Again, I'm very new at this, being the Chief of Staff at the time and this is all unfolding for the first time in front of me and I'm trying to read and figure out obviously, I'm very loyal to Congressman Rodino, but I don't know. He could come back, but interestingly he put a very, very strong argument for going through the Judiciary Committee and he being the lead of this effort. You don't realize that. People don't just say gee, I'm surprised. He had a very close relationship with Tip O'Neill.

They go back, I think the Congressman came in the late '40s, so they came into Congress around the same time and there's a strong relationship there, there's a strong loyalty. In the end, again I was never part of the conversations, they took place in the Speaker's office or in Mr. O'Neill's office, but in the end they made the decision and I've always believed that it was Tip O'Neill's decision in the end that said it's going to go to the Judiciary Committee and it's going to go to the whole Committee.

Naftali: What role do you think Carl Albert played?

O'Brien: Again, I think Carl Albert is highly underestimated because we tend to do those things, because Tip O'Neill was such a large figure. I think he was considered a wise head. I think he understood the institution. He had a great deep knowledge of the House and the institution and I think was an institutionalist in the House. I think his voice was counted. I just think that Tip was such a strong figure and that he was more visible and more dominant in those conversations, but my recollections was that people respected Carl Albert.

Naftali: Congressman Rodino gets this responsibility. Now you have to build a new staff and you're Chief of Staff. Tell me what you remember of that process, Francis.

O'Brien: My assumption was, then again I'm just in there a couple months now, there was, I was here in New York at the time of the so-called Saturday Night Massacre, because there had been talk of impeachment all that fall. There was I think Father Drinan, John Conyers, Congressman Waldie from California, these are the more liberal members and others were starting to talk about that. They may have in fact even introduced articles into the House and legislation etc.

But the Congressman was a very measure person and just very, very slow in terms of coming to any kind of decision, but I remember one night, again I'm working off the assumptions of a new person, and once a decision was made in the Judiciary Committee, we sat down in his office one night and my assumption is the staff on the Committee would do this. We were sitting in his office one night, I do remember this very well and I will not attempt to imitate the way the Congressman talked but he was very measured.

He said that he would like to create a new staff. I thought okay. He said if I would mind heading up that search for chief counsel. I can't remember my exact words, but the feeling in the pit of my stomach was my god, this was way beyond my capacity, is what I thought at the time, but I said fine and walked out of the office. That's how I got the news. There's obviously a back story of why that decision was made which he and I and others were engaged in this conversation about how to deal with this, but I didn't think he would arrive at that conclusion, nor did I think I would be the

person that was going to be the point person on this. I'm not a lawyer.

This is a committee that's all lawyers. I didn't even know any lawyers. I just come out of that generation where we didn't even like lawyers. That's the decision he decided and the counsel of the Committee at the time was a gentleman named Jerome Zeifman, very accomplished, had been there for years, very intelligent, but the Congressman I think came to two conclusions why he wanted to do this.

I think he felt that Jerome Zeifman was too partisan. He had very strong views on President Nixon and very vocal. I think Mr. Rodino didn't think he had the measured personality that the Congressman thought was going to be needed for this endeavor. He certainly had the intellectual skills, but he thought he was too partisan.

Another issue that was very important to the Congressman as it is to all politicians is loyalty. He never said this directly. I don't think he felt Jerry Zeifman was going to be loyal to him in the sense that Jerry had served other members of Congress, other members of the Judiciary Committee before he became Chairman and I think he felt that, again this was a very strong issue with Congressman Rodino, is that he just didn't feel that he would have his complete loyalty in this most difficult endeavor.

I think if you put those two together as a generalization, that's why he said I think we need to form a new group and first we must start with someone who will lead them. That's how we got there.

Naftali: Okay, now, the tough part. How do you, a non-lawyer who's not from that world, start to collect candidates?

O'Brien: Sometimes you never know you might want to know how history is done.

Naftali: You always do.

O'Brien: I remember I went back to my office; it was the Rayburn Building that was right next to the Congressman's office. I sat down, it was in the evening when I did that, and I remember I said to myself I don't know what to do. It was clear from that conversation though never said, there was always when dealing with the Congressman, with the Chairman, there was always you had to understand what was not said, because that was the important part of dealing with

the Congressman, was what he didn't say, but what he meant to have said in that conversation.

He didn't want me to go back to...normally I'd pick up the phone and call Jerry Zeifman or call someone on the Judiciary Committee and say you know anybody? That clearly was not in the cards, because Jerry Zeifman was a candidate. He was a strong choice of many members of the Committee both for his intellectual ability and for his political position. I couldn't do that.

So what I did often in my life, I called my brother in New York, another non-lawyer and I outlined my challenge. I said what do we do? We started asking people we know, but I didn't know anyone in Washington. He said there's a book, there's a law book, because I've seen it here that has all the lawyers in the country, which I think is called Hubbell.

Naftali: Martindale.

O'Brien: Hubbell Martindale. So I said let's get that book. First of all, we sat down, my brother and I and we thought about this. I went back to the Congressman and I said before we get to who with names, what are we looking for? I went back to the Congressman, the next day or so, I said give me the criteria? What do you want in this person? He said first and foremost this person should not be partisan.

He obviously should be a person of intellectual standing, someone who can deal with this. Must be honorable. He laid out a series of criteria which reminded myself and when I relayed it to my brother, going back to the not too distant past to the McCarthy hearings. We were sort of looking for a modern version of Joe Walsh. Walsh or Welch?

Naftali: Welch.

O'Brien: Joe Welch who was the Chief Counsel I think of that inquiry who was thought of as above reproach, who was a person of honor. That became our talking point. In other words, we wrote down what we were looking for, it was that model. We would like the idea if the person would be Republican. In other words, that would be even the best that you could get a Republican chief counsel and the Congressman made that point to me a number of times. That would the best of all worlds to show sort of a non-partisan.

Okay. So that was a criteria. What we did is, we said let's start with, we had this book but it means nothing, but our thinking was, my thinking my brother's thinking, was we'd call law deans we said. Law deans know people. We'll call maybe you'd call ten and I'll call ten. We'll get them on the phone and we'll lay out this criteria, tell them what we're doing and we thought for sure, they'll come up with one. There'll be a name. They'll all have a name. That will be the name.

We'll circle the name and I'll go in and say here Congressman, here are the three names all the law deans like in the country. So we started on that path. We just looked up law deans all over the country from here to California. From Harvard to Ohio State to University of California, we just covered the universe. We covered all sections of the country and we had these conversations and most of the deans were very responsive.

They were honored that we called and we laid out the criteria and we asked them to think about it and they would come back with names. We just furiously started writing all these names down. There was no consensus none. There were a lot of names. Every once in awhile you know. Then we had to figure out, okay so we put a name. We had to do research, this is the days before the Internet, the days before computers almost, we had to do all this manual research and find how old these people were, what's their background.

Then I'd get staff from the Congressman's office, I get a couple people to do research and we'd research these people. Some just didn't appear to have enough experience. Some were too old at the time, etc. This kept going on for some time and outside of that room there's enormous pressure building on the Congressman for not forming this staff. He had told the leadership he would form this staff.

He told the members of the Judiciary Committee that the search was on. I do not think he told who was leading that search, but the search was on. That he was interviewing people. This went on for some time. The pressure was just enormous on us at the time and just on the Congressman and on all of us in trying to come up with this. Months passed. Finally, we started, I started asking everybody. Everybody I knew.

The Chief Justice at the time in the Supreme Court was Berger. My brother calls up Berger in this search and asks if he could come see him. I'm trying to think in this day and age. He said who he was

and what he was doing and could he come by and see him. This actually took place. Berger met him in back chambers. My brother asked him.

He didn't come up with any names, but he thought what we were looking for, I think we were way out of bounds actually here in terms of what we were doing, because we just didn't know. But I think Justice Berger, my brother's outlined this is the kind, I think he agreed and made some other, but came up with no names. He felt it was not his place to name anyone, but he saw him.

Then I started asking, and to think about today if you did this, I started asking reporters. I didn't know any reporters, but reporters are covering this and there was a few I knew. I started asking reporters if they knew anyone. These were reporters who I thought were…

Naftali: Did Jimmy Breslin, was he covering you at that point?

O'Brien: Jimmy Breslin was covering this at that point.

Naftali: Did you ask Jimmy Breslin?

O'Brien: I absolutely asked Jimmy Breslin. Yes.

Naftali: What did Jimmy Breslin say?

O'Brien: I don't remember.

Naftali: Did he says why are you asking me?

O'Brien: Jimmy Breslin. What was interesting is no one ever said anything. No one thought this was unusual. Meanwhile, they'd go out the next day and attack us, but none of these conversations were ever passed. If they knew anybody, again this was a very different era, but that didn't happen.

Naftali: Francis, I've just got to ask, just to give the viewer a sense of these months. Congressman Rodino knows in October that he's going to be running this?

O'Brien: Correct.

Naftali: October and November and December, you and your brother –

O'Brien: And anybody else we could get, a hold of, yes.

Naftali: Are running this search.

O'Brien: Correct. Actually the viewers won't see it, but I just showed you today one of the many files, just that has not been touched for over 30 years, chock-a-block full of names. I mean, it was the file that I kept of all the recommendations and the research we found. Saying all of that out of just frustration, again to my older brother, one day he said, my brother worked for Bob Kennedy, he says you know there was, he did not work in President Kennedy's administration, he worked for Senator Kennedy both when he ran for the Senate and after.

Naftali: What's your brother's name?

O'Brien: John. John O'Brien.

Naftali: What did he do for Senator Kennedy?

O'Brien: He was a political aide. I think he worked in the '64 campaign. I think that's how he did it and he was a political person. But he called me and said you know there was a man named John Doar who worked for President Kennedy and works for Senator Kennedy who during President Kennedy's administration was a very well-known civil rights lawyer and was one of the people then Robert Kennedy who was Attorney General sent south to help work on the civil rights issues that were there at the time and was a very highly respected.

I took that in. It's great. We began the search. Where's John Doar? No internet. No computer. I didn't know how to spell his name so I had D-O-O-R, D-O-R-E. So finally, I just couldn't find him. So finally again, I went back to my brother, I said you have to call someone in the Kennedy family and say. So anyway it turns out we found him. He was I believe at the time at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Corporation, which was a community health organization founded by Robert Kennedy, I believe. I think that's where he was or had been there.

Anyway, clearly he started to catch our attention, certainly, caught my attention and others because of his background. Turns out he was appointed by President Eisenhower, was a Republican from the Midwest. Had this incredible reputation while at the Justice Department, so he started to get on our list. I started to feed these names to the Congressman and there were maybe ten that we decided that had reached the place where they would meet

Congressman Rodino's criteria and that it was time for him to start meeting these people.

We began the interview process. I think John Doar remembers it. I think I called him. I think that's how he remembers it, that I'm the one who called him and had him come in. I can't remember the time. I think I talked to him first. I have to think about that for a minute for people who are watching this. Here I am - this young staff person, not a lawyer, had very little experience. I'm interviewing one of the icons of the civil rights movement for this job.

Clearly, I was just a clearinghouse for the Congressman. Anyway, we present the names. He interviewed the various candidates and he came to the conclusion that he thought that John Doar was the person that he wanted, that would meet his criteria. We called John Doar. I think I made the call to John Doar, because a person in this position, I called John Doar to say if you're going to be asked would you accept it if you're asked? He said that he would. So I told the Congressman that he would and then he called him and he was hired.

Naftali: After the Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment, the New York Times wrote a story about the history of the Committee and made the argument that Congressman Rodino had a hard time making up his mind and that in order to push him to make up his mind, somebody leaked to the press the names of John Doar and a few other people. Is it true that the Congressman had a hard time actually deciding?

O'Brien: I don't know if he had a hard time making up his mind. He was extremely judicious. He was very measured. This became one of the great assets, shows you where you are in your point of history, that became one of the great assets, because again he had a conversation one night, he said, and of course I was this very young sort of let's get going staffer, and he said to me one evening you know, I don't know how this is going to come out, this inquiry. He took it extremely seriously.

There could be nothing more serious in the country than the potential removal of the President of the United States. He said you know once you begin this process, you can't stop it. It will go to a conclusion. I don't know what that conclusion is, but before we begin I want to make sure that we're on the right path and that we have done the right things. I think that was always upmost in his

mind that once the process began, it will follow a course and he was right.

Once the inquiry opens, once you get your staff, he said to me I don't know what it's going to be. I think he was very judicious. Some say he had a hard time making up his mind. I think he probably did, because he had nothing to fall back on. No one did it before. There's no history here as you well know. I remember we put a book together. I remember a thin little book with a tan binding that was sort of the history of impeachment that we had the judiciary staff, we had to go back to Johnson's time to go back to the 1860s to find out there was any history of what do you do.

There was no history. This was all very uncharted. He was not about to go into this in a way that was not judicious. He was under a lot of pressure because many members of this Committee, as it is today I think, were very liberal and again he did not have standing. He was not, he didn't have the respect when he took over the Committee that Manny Celler had, and he had to earn that respect. The same time he's been given this extraordinary task, he has to build credibility with this committee. He has to hold them off.

They have to believe the path he is taking is the correct path and that it is a balanced path and it's not a partisan path. This was very difficult. He took his time and what always amazed me, it never bothered him. I used to get very nervous. Pressure never bothered him. I mean it bothers all people. He was just very calm about it.

Naftali: I'm going to jump ahead, because you raised something. What about the time when he thought he was having a heart attack? Remember in February, he gets sick? This is time when they're discussing the –

O'Brien: I remember that. It doesn't come to memory as such a crisis. I think he got sick, they thought maybe he had some sort of heart condition, but it was not, at least internally; it was not considered oh my god. I think he was under a lot of pressure and I think he had what everyone has high blood pressure or whatever, but it's something I don't remember much about.

Naftali: Okay. By the way, did Melvin Laird, the former Secretary of Defense, play any role whatsoever in the selection of John Doar?

O'Brien: I think he supported it. I think there was, in other words, once Doar's name came to the fore and once it started to surface, I think

maybe Laird and others through back door messaging said that they thought that that was an honorable choice.

Naftali: Was there any pushback from the more partisan Democrats on the Committee, because you chose a Republican?

O'Brien: Yes. There was a lot of displeasure in the more liberal elements of the Committee and I think in the House that here's a Republican, this is an incredible undertaking and why would you ever pick a Republican to do this? I think there was that. There was a lot of criticism. Everybody had an opinion, because this was such, again my amazement was how the Congressman dealt with that. He just sort of, he was always in his three button, three piece suit, always meticulously dressed, always very calm and he just absorbed and just moved on.

Naftali: Francis, was there more pushback from more partisan Republicans because you selected somebody who was associated with the Kennedy's?

O'Brien: Yes. That was the argument you could see right away. It was on the one side you had here's some big liberal left wing person, and the liberal Democrats saying well here's a Republican. The Congressman's mind I think, this is all many years later, I think he said this is about right.

In other words, because he knew in his mind that the pathway would not be either one of those, if the conclusion was to be made that President Nixon would be found guilty or not guilty of charges of impeachment, that it's not going to be made by that partisan element or that partisan element. He felt it had to be made; the conclusion had to be made out of what he called this middle.

Naftali: You at a certain point say to Mr. Doar, once he's hired, now it's up to you to recruit the rest of the staff or how do you participate?

O'Brien: I had to sign off. Actually the Chairman had to sign off. There's a back story. There was a time, because that's all I did. I was Chief of Staff, but I didn't do any of his other House work. A lot of things, head committee meetings were taking place and normal business was taking place, but I was only doing this. A number of times I asked him did he not think I should go on the Committee staff, because there were certain things where only members of the Committee or staff of the Committee could participate in certain meetings.

He always demurred and said no, I don't think I'd rather keep you here. It was difficult a lot of times for me, because it sort of restrained my activities, but then it became clear later that no Committee member could get to me, because if you're on Committee staff, a ranking member can have you fired or could do whatever, but you can't do anything to his personal staff.

He said no, I want you, and I didn't realize this until much later as he had me do various activities with the different members of that. But one of the things was signing off. John, this was up to him. Then, of course, remember the minority had to pick a counsel, who by the way was on our list, was on the Chairman's list for Chief Counsel. It was Mr. Jenner from Chicago. I can't remember his first name.

Naftali: Bert.

O'Brien: Bert.

Naftali: Did Congressman Rodino interview Bert Jenner for the job?

O'Brien: I don't remember, but I know he was on the list, because I remember the Congressman, I talked to him one night and saying this is a great choice. Again, he met the criteria from Rodino's point. He thought he was honorable. He thought he was not partisan and he was Republican, strong Republican roots, but out of Chicago.

He thought he had the intellectual heft. He was very pleased with that choice when they picked him. So that was done. Then a lot of politicking, because remember this is a political process, that took place in the picking of staff, because to counter, to satisfy the more liberal members of the Committee, they wanted their person on the staff who came in the name of a gentleman named Nick Cates.

Naftali: Dick Cates.

O'Brien: Dick Cates, yeah. From Wisconsin, I believe. I think it was Kastenmeier. That was a little challenging, because that wasn't John Doar's first selection, because he didn't meet John Doar's criteria about non-partisan, but politics plays a very important role here. He was chosen as a very high-ranking deputy counsel at the time. But John essentially had the job of interviewing and assembling the staff that came over, 120 people. I think he had fairly open control over that.

In other words, I think he was given a free hand is what I'm trying to say doing that. There were political choices we had to make. Members had their choices that John would have to interview. I do remember one particular...Congressman Brooks who was a very powerful member of congress from Texas and a very populous liberal and not happy.

I think he liked the Chairman a lot but he didn't have the fire that Jack Brooks had and certainly John Doar didn't have the fire that Jack Brooks wanted. Jack Brooks sort of lead a rump group that actually involved Jerry Zeifman the general counsel and a whole team that we had to deal with over the whole course of the inquiry.

I remember one day I got called up from Congressman Brooks' office and asked to come over. So I went over and Jack Brooks had a resume in front of him Jack Brooks says boy, he said this gentleman's name, I can't remember him. He was on the staff. He was a young lawyer from I think Yale or something. He said do you know so and so? Yes, sir, I said.

The Chairman assigned him. He's a member of staff. He said boy, do you know where he's from. I said I'm not sure what school he went to so I said no, sir. Do you know where he was born? I said no, sir. He said he was born in Beaumont, Texas. He said does that mean anything to you? No, sir. You have to think this is another generation. I was dressed in a three-piece suit and fin tie.

Jack Brooks reaches across the table and grabs my tie and starts pulling me across the desk, big desk, says, "Boy, that's my district." He says don't you ever hire somebody from my district without getting my approval. My necktie was very tight at that point around my neck and he dropped me and I go yes, sir. I went back. Jack Brooks… I had approval. John Doar wanted to hire this person. He was highly qualified. Congressman said fine and I signed off on it. It was just a normal procedure.

I think Jack Brooks one of many times called the Congressman and said that he wanted me fired because I had done this and this just can't happen. This was a breach of protocol. You just never do this. The Congressman being a good politician said Jack, which he often said, sometimes I just can't control the kid. He just does things that I just don't understand – then began the great relationship between the Congressman and myself understanding my role and the role of everyone.

Anyway, he was hired. I think he's a very well-known lawyer today. I just can't remember his name. Anyway, I'm making this story long for you. John essentially, Mr. Jenner and others picked the staff. They had a pretty good 90% of the staff was their choice and I think they picked some of the best people that you later see in the country.

Naftali: Do you remember any of the Republicans pushing for their –

O'Brien: Pushing for staff?

Naftali: Yeah.

O'Brien: Oh, absolutely. We had to sign off on those too. Everything was...it was a very easy. It was very partisan, yes. It was very tense, yes. But there was a cordiality and respect between the two parties. The ranking member was Congressman Hutchinson who was quite elderly and had the deep respect of Chairman Rodino, but Hutchinson was up in age this obviously was very stressful for him.

The second ranking Republican was I think a gentleman named McClory from Illinois I think. He became very important. In other words, the Congressman was in constant consultation with him. There was that relationship where that you respected each other. There was a lot of partisanship. There were a lot of people out on the fringes, but there was a deep respect, institutional respect between the two parties.

There wasn't some of the rancor that exists today even though this was an unbelievable story and undertaking with an enormous amount of partisan input here.

Naftali: Can you help us understand that, because as you said it was a partisan time and yet there wasn't the rancor? Was it just the way the congressmen interacted with each other?

O'Brien: I think institutionally, the institution is still very strong. Congress, both the House and Senate, I think they had very strong leaders. I think there was a lot of respect on both sides of the aisle. From what I can remember being there all these years ago, when it was time to be partisan you were partisan. When these different bills are up. Yes, there was a lot of name-calling, but it was all within a boundary.

I think personalities...people forget about personalities, personalities make a great deal of difference. Congressman Rodino knew all these people. They spent enormous amounts of time together. A lot of time it was in the gym actually, where they all went to the members gym. Congressman was a daily participant, he played handball in the gym. They ate lunch together. They went to the members dining room. There was just a lot of, if not socializing, there was just not in terms of going out to dinner and all that, but there was a lot of people knew each other.

When you know somebody, there's a lot of respect for the other person. I think the personalities really helped. Of course, as you look back at history now, so many of these members on both sides of the aisles came up. It sort of makes me proud about the House. These are just sort of unknown people and they rose to the occasion. It's chilling.

In fact, when you think back historically how these sort of average members who most citizens never heard of stepped up and took this extraordinary duty as a public servant. That it rose above, yes it was partisan, but felt very strongly that if you're going to conduct this inquiry, it had to be a fair inquiry. I think there was a core that believed that. The question was would this be a fair inquiry? That was always the overriding question.

Naftali: One of the first challenges for the Congressman was to decide a debate that was happening among the staff as to whether these proceedings would be viewed as a grand jury, where the President's council could not be involved, at least from my reading of the story. Mr. Doar really felt it should be a grand jury, but the Congressman overruled it. You remember that? Could you tell us?

O'Brien: I just remember saying, I'm not a lawyer, but I remember saying every evening what would happen just about every evening during the week, the Committee was housed in another building on Capitol Hill, but John and some staff would come over and sort of review the day. I remember this discussion taking place amongst many others, but I think in the end the Congressman said this is not a jury, this is not a court. This is Congress.

He didn't feel that, again, he was a great institutionalist. He felt that's not their role. This is not a grand jury and it shouldn't be thought of as a grand jury. I just remember just, again you always set things and it took a while to figure that out, but it just didn't feel right to him. That's the way it should be conducted.

Again, he had enormous respect for John and for everyone on that Committee, but there's where many people underestimated the Congressman at the time, because you'd say he would defer. He wouldn't defer to anybody actually. He just took it all in and tried to...then he laid on what the institution should do. What's the role of this House? What's the role of these people? Then he'd make the decision. Yeah. I remember those conversations.

Naftali: The other issue was whether you had to find the President guilty of a crime to impeach him and ultimately the Committee decided no.

O'Brien: Right.

Naftali: Do you remember what role the Congressman played in that?

O'Brien: He played a very important role, but there were other members that were very critical. It's not just a staff thing and they come and deliver. Very important to the Congressman thinking. Paul Sarbanes, a young congressman from Maryland, later became a Senator, now retired, strong intellectual became very important advisor and more than advisor, he was a co-member, but very influential to Congressman Rodino in terms of his thinking, his sort of putting his intellectual thought into this.

Don Edwards, very liberal congressman from California former FBI agent years ago, very important, because he was a very reasonable person, very liberal, but he was sort of the Congressman's gate, sort of door, to the liberal wing of the Committee in the party. Don, Mr. Edwards became very important. There was a group that the Congressman reached out to that were very influential in coming to these decisions. These were not a sort of Peter Rodino, John Doar, and that's all that was involved.

There was a lot of discussion. A lot of I think memos and a lot of they used to pack every Friday, the Congressman back to his district in Newark, they'd pack a big binder with all these memos and all this thinking. Then he'd read them over the weekend and all this discussion would take place with the various members. Remember Congressman was very, he couldn't do this without the consent of his fellow members. He had to bring them along. He had to hold them at bay and let the process work, but at the same time they couldn't feel excluded.

It was pretty extraordinary that today they allowed this inquiry to go on so long without their input, without their involvement. There was a lot of conversation to get there. There was a lot of behind the

scenes conversations that took place on a regular basis in the Congressman's office, one on one with the members, both in the Committee, behind the Committee room, in the Congressman's office. There was constant outreach about what various members thought on these various issues.

Naftali: Talking about pressure on the Congressman. When do you remember Tip O'Neill starting to tell him, "Let's focus on all these?"

O'Brien: Oh, it came early and, again, relationships and trust became very important because Tip O'Neill has shown great encouragement in supporting Rodino's choice to lead this investigation in the Judiciary Committee, but Tip O'Neill was a man of action and Rodino was a very methodical person and those always didn't match up well.

So on a regular basis Tip – the large Tip O'Neill – and the diminutive Peter Rodino would be getting together and Tip would be putting his finger on him saying, "Peter, we have to move this process along, you know," and Peter would say, "Yes. I understand. I understand." This went on a regular basis, both informally and then when the Chairman would be called over the Speaker's office formally, that this process had to move forward and each time –

Again, being as it turns out historically that they're all great master politicians, he bought more time. He'd always buy more time. It's not that he said…he'd go to the staff. He'd go to John Dore and to the staff and what he had to do was give them the time. Again, he was extremely protective of the staff because they had to do that work isolated from the pressures, the political pressures even though we started this conversation it's a political process. He wanted them away from that pressure.

So whatever had to be absorbed he would take that pressure or other key members other allies, but no pressure on the staff and there was constant effort to put pressure on the staff where they would call John Doar and others, "What's going on?" Of course, John, as we know, is one of the more discreet people in the world, but this is enormous pressure.

First of all, it taught me, just watching Congressmen, just how to deal with pressure. He just absorbed it and I think it bothered him. Yes, it bothered him. I mean, he's human, but he felt the process was so important that this had to be done in a way in the end that

was considered bipartisan or nonpartisan and that he felt that you could not rush this.

Naftali: Did he get a little impatient at any point with Mr. Doar?

O'Brien: Oh yes. Oh yes. That's another story.

Naftali: Well, no. Let's hear it.

O'Brien: Yes because John was so methodical and so cautious - John is very cautious – and many evenings John would come over, in his way…I hope you get a chance to talk to him. Just an extraordinary human being, but yes and the Chairman, in his way would say, "I think we have to move this process on."

That was why he would ask me to help if I could sit and talk to John and help the process and the answer was usually, no. That John needed the time he needed. There was some give, but again, deep respect. I mean, that's the keyword. He respected John. He respected the staff. He respected what they felt and he was willing to take the pressure.

Naftali: So the pressure would come from his fellow Committee members in addition to Tip O'Neill. Do you remember?

O'Brien: Jeez, first and foremost, first and foremost.

Naftali: Do you remember who were some of the tough ones or tougher ones?

O'Brien: Well, on both sides. On the Republican side, you had people like Congressman Sandman. I think he was from New Jersey – just. He was way out there, but there were more important Republicans. There was a Congressman in California.

Naftali: Wiggins?

O'Brien: Wiggins, very important, who Congressmen deeply respected and he was a very strong supporter of President Nixon. Very strong supporter and he was putting enormous pressure. "Let's move this. Let's conclude this. This is being dragged on. This is partisan. This was…," etcetera, etcetera and respect had to be paid there.

On the other side, you had sort of a young Congressman Conyers. You had Congressman Waldie from California. You had Father Drinan. You had Jack Brooks first and foremost, very powerful figure in the House and on the Committee, just putting enormous pressure on the Congressmen on a regular basis to bring this to a conclusion. "Let's get some articles. Let's get some votes here."

Looking back on it, you'd say how he held this together just by sheer force of personality and he was never confrontational. You couldn't get him in an argument. So it's sort of the worst kind of opponent to have. You couldn't draw him out because he just would absorb it. He would listen to you.

He would. He would understand you and then he would answer you and have no idea what he said because you never knew what he said to members. It wasn't me because he would just talk in these riddles and it was just extraordinary and you just didn't know – "Hm. Did he say we're going to move forward or not?"

Naftali: Give us an example, for instance.

O'Brien: Oh, I can't remember anymore. It's so hard, but I remember it's sort of you had to get – what we used to call – the Chairman Speke. You had to understand, he had to just come out of the meeting and say, "Okay, this is what he meant," because he just never said anything *directly* to you.

Naftali: But he knew what he wanted, right?

O'Brien: Exactly. He knew exactly what he wanted. He was telling you, but he never told you in a direct way and I guess one of the reasons I got hired was because I sort of understood, I guess, what he was saying and could understand him very well actually. No, he was very sure what he was saying. He just never said it in a way that, say, you and I would say something, but his outreach was extraordinary.

He felt that he had to keep lines of communication to a broad spectrum of the membership on the Committee and in those days, remember, the Chairman was a very powerful figure and rank was very important. If you're a freshman, you're lucky you ever got to speak to the Chairman.

On the Republican side, every once in a while he'd invite Congressman Cohen from Maine up to his office to get his thoughts. He'd invite Barbara Jordan up. Charlie Rangel. These were all freshmen and then on a regular basis, which I don't think many people knew. I was sent out on a regular basis to meet with a group of members just to make sure that they felt that they were being connected to the Congressman – Congressman Flowers of Alabama, Congressman Mann.

These all became very critical people. He already identified in his mind very early who was really important here in terms of that would have an important public impact. There was how these

people voted – yea or nay – would become very important in the outcome – didn't know how they'd vote at the time – but he felt it was very important that they trust him, that they felt that both personal contact and a rare contact from myself and others, that they had a line, that they felt their voices were being heard.

I mean, this was never reported or anything, but on a regular basis I would make the rounds of members and just talk to them. I wasn't a lawyer. I didn't talk particularly about the case. They would tell me what they thought which I would then come back to the members or come back to the Congressman. He would have a phone conversation with them, invite them over.

So this was his way of keeping his Committee members intact in a very low key way, where they had a…these people's lives, their political lives, were at stake. They had to put a lot of trust in him and they have their own lives or own political lives to worry about and they knew this was an extraordinary undertaking, which had the whole nation's attention. So they had to trust him and he had to build their trust up.

Naftali: This group that you'd go and see, did you see them individually or as a group?

O'Brien: No, individually.

Naftali: Did they include the group that would be the swing Republicans, like Hogan and Railsback or were you just meeting with the southern Democrats.

O'Brien: Southern, mostly southern Democrats.

Naftali: In the beginning where were they leaning or where they leaning anywhere on the issue of the President?

O'Brien: Oh, I think very reluctant – very, very reluctant on both sides of the apple. I mean the early readings and, again, Congress would never ask the question. They would never because you'd never want somebody to answer. I've learned from him never ask a question 'til you know the answer.

So he would never ask them how you lean. That question would never come up in any form, but his political instincts, he understood these people were very, very reluctant to bring any charges against a President of the United States. It didn't matter who the President was and there was some partisanship there, but you had a very skeptical center audience that he thought were key.

So his conclusion very early on was they're going to decide. It's this group that you talked about – Republicans and Democrats – were going to decide this issue and that they either felt the case against the President was substantial or not and that was the strategy from day one.

Naftali: In the beginning and it's a long time ago, but do you think it mattered to the Chairman which direction it went?

O'Brien: No. It sounds corny. He was a patriot. He really was a patriot. He was a great institutionalist and it's almost like being picked for a jury. I don't know if you ever were picked of a jury? All of a sudden you take on this responsibility. You do – oh my God. I'm a juror. I think that's the way the Congressman looked at this.

This extraordinary duty was thrust upon him and that was more than anything he ever thought about his life or prepared for and he did not know what the outcome would be. I mean, that's why it turned out historically. He was the right person. You would not know that going down the line of who you're going to pick. You know, that's fate.

His demeanor, his intellectual strength, his institutional belief, his sense of being from immigrant roots, he was extraordinarily patriotic and that you would be charged with this task of potentially taking the President of the United States…it was in some way unimaginable to him at the beginning. Unimaginable and yet, as he said, once the process begins it had to have a conclusion.

Naftali: Mr. Doar begins to present the Statements of Information May 9th. So now we've been at it for some months, a lot of pressure. Finally, the material is coming up. Again, I've read that a number of the members were just bored and confused. In the beginning, how did the Chairman view the process as Mr. Doar began to lay out the information?

O'Brien: He thought it was too…it wasn't crisp, too legal. Again, these are all lawyers, but it was too dense. Lawyers over write anything and I think that was his…and that's rather a flip statement, but he said, "This has to be understandable, but it has to be understandable to the members. It's more important…this has to be understandable to the American citizens. This is just not understandable."

He said, "You have to make these points that you've just mentioned understandable to the members and eventually to the

American public. So go back," and over time, these had to be made more understandable.

Naftali: For six weeks? Do you remember that?

O'Brien: Mm-hmm. There was just a lot of pressure. There was a lot of pressure and there was a lot of back and forth. Remember, we did have a hundred and something lawyers here. It was difficult and again, as we said in the beginning, this is a political process. This is not a legal process.

Naftali: So does Mr. Doar then, he finally gives a much more impassioned speech?

O'Brien: Yes.

Naftali: Some have said it's because the Chairman talked to him.

O'Brien: Well, I think the Chairman had many conversations. He and John had many conversations and I think Mr. Doar has just decided he just would –

Naftali: But do you remember that moment?

O'Brien: I remember that moment.

Naftali: Please tell us.

O'Brien: Well, I mean, I just remember that…it's one of those conversations in the evening. He said, "Do you accept that this expression was used in that stage, but Jesus, you just have to step this up." He said, "You have to do something at that table." Again, he never talked this way.

That's the thing of it, but John Doar fully understood that this was it, that he had it make the case to these members. Whatever the case would be he had to make the case and I think John sort of went home and processed that and came back and there's a lot of back and forth.

Naftali: Given how important this was in this history of the case, did the Congressman present –? There was a famous Congressman speech or Chairman's speech, but did he show emotion when he –?

O'Brien: Oh yes. There was emotion here. First and foremost, Peter Rodino was Italian, so he's very measured, but there were times when he could get emotional in his measured way. There was no doubt that John and staff understood what had to be done and I think that was the relationship, but again, by then there was such incredible trust

between them. Great differences of opinion – why wouldn't there be? I mean, again, these were monumental decisions.

I can remember the night – moving off your subject for a minute. I remember the night we had to send a letter to the President. I mean, the debate went deep into the night. I mean, do you actually send a letter to the President of the United States? Every day we had to make these kinds of decisions. We had no guidance. So all of these things – every issue, every legal issues, every political – had to be discussed, thought through, talked out.

You're dealing with an intellectually powerful staff on both sides of the aisle, just powerful, intellectually powerful people. In terms of their intellectual heft and then you had to sort of bring that political process to it. So there was a lot of coming…there was a lot of a debate. I don't think there was an easy day in this process from the day it begins to the day it ended.

Naftali: Well, the story of the letter. This comes after the White House has issued its transcripts.

O'Brien: Right.

Naftali: I've interviewed former Senator Cohen who wanted to participate in that letter.

O'Brien: Brought to the Chairman's office?

Naftali: This was a really hard event for him because he felt sort of left in the cold here. Do you remember? He was, at that point, your only Republican ally on this particular issue.

O'Brien: Correct.

Naftali: I think.

O'Brien: Right and he had been courted, right. Courted is the wrong word, but he certainly had access to the Congressman. There had been conversations because the Congressman, again, he thought he'd be important even though he was a young member, he thought that Mr. Cohen would be helpful to the process.

Naftali: But in the end Cohen's draft of the letter is not the one that was sent.

O'Brien: No, it wasn't.

Naftali: You're smiling.

O'Brien: It just wasn't, that's all…it's called politics.

Naftali: Okay. The Democratic members needed to be satisfied.

O'Brien: Correct and also I think the Congressman decided what the correct letter had to be and he was deeply appreciative of Congressman Cohen's input.

Naftali: Let's talk a bit about the tapes. Did you listen to any of them?

O'Brien: Mm-hmm.

Naftali: What affect did they have on you?

O'Brien: Not much, actually. The Congressman asked me a couple of times to listen to tapes and I tried not to. In this process – again, this is going back – I didn't want to get personal. In other words, I wanted to keep a distance in this. Someone remarked to me, which I think is a compliment. They said, "You never said any anti-Nixon word ever." It was a reporter said that to me all those years later.

They were telling me I had dinner with a reporter years ago. I mean, recently, Elizabeth Drew, who covered the event for *The New Yorker* at the time, she said, "You know, all those years you never…all those times we covered you, you never said a word about Nixon – ever," and I think that came from the Chairman. It also came from a personal…not that I didn't have a view, but I didn't think it was my place to be talking, but to get there you had to keep some distance.

So I wasn't actually very curious about the tapes. There was enormous curiosity with the thing and I wasn't that curious. It wasn't my job. It wasn't where I fit in. Nobody on the Committee's going to ask me what I thought of tapes and so I sort of stayed out. It wasn't my…so to speak. So I didn't have any opinion and then I've never even thought about listening to them again.

Naftali: The Chairman listened to some tapes?

O'Brien: Yes, he did. He was bothered.

Naftali: Can you tell us more?

O'Brien: Well, he was bothered at the language. He was bothered by sort of the tone. It's the same rack as everybody. I think he was surprised about President Nixon. A lot of tapes surprised him. I don't know a lot of the tapes, but I mean, some of the tapes he'd come back and

we'd talk a little about it at night. He was bothered, I thought. He didn't think some of the things were –

Again, he was very proper. He'd just think some of the things were very proper, language and that, but we never talked about nor did he ever comment about the substance of the case, the substance of the tapes, but I can tell you just bothered by some of the tapes and the condition of the President.

Naftali: Did you see a sort of a shift in his position?

O'Brien: No. Whatever he and I talked about never went beyond he and I from day one to that last day. It's just not what his views were, but he tried to keep…intellectually as best as he could, he tried to keep centered.

Naftali: Was it hard for him to keep centered?

O'Brien: Not really because it fit his personality. In other words, he was not very partisan so it didn't fit his personality and I think the obligations so overwhelmed him and put just a weight on him and I think an important quality all of us had, he was very fearful in the sense of not doing the right thing and I think fear is a wonderful emotion to have at a time like this, that it keeps you on track. So he didn't have to time to get out and be bothered by this. The whole thing was so overwhelming.

Naftali: I apologize for the analogy, but we were a little like the canary in the mineshaft. When you were out talking to these conservative Democrats, when did you start seeing a shift because they're talking to you what they're thinking and, obviously, they ultimately vote against President Nixon? Is it slow?

O'Brien: Very slow. It's a very slow process. We would talk about that, but never publicly. Never to the staff, to John's staff actually, about where we thought these people were. That was a conversation that was very deeply held. It may have gone, though, I've no knowledge. It may have gone to the Speaker or to someone like that. I mean, we sort of knew what the case was at a certain point.

Naftali: Voting starts July 27th. It's a long time ago, but did you think you had a majority for Article One?

O'Brien: Yes.

Naftali: Did you think that a month before or was it a week before, a day?

O'Brien: I don't remember when, but we had talked about it as those night approached, those days approached, that he thought that the case

had been made. That's a better way to put it, actually. He thought the case had been made against the President and he thought that the key scent that he felt was so important – probably as a Democrat – that they believed that the case had been made.

Naftali: When Railsback and Cohen and Hogan are meeting with Flowers is somebody telling you about that?

O'Brien: Flowers and I had a good relationship. He died very young. We had a good relationship. So we'd talk about, you know… We'd get a sense of where people were. He talked to the Chairman – Flowers would – not to me.

Naftali: I've seen the images of the debate. Flowers would be very emotional. He was very emotional.

O'Brien: Very.

Naftali: Tell us a little bit about other kinds of fears. This is a very tense Washington, isn't it?

O'Brien: Well, it was an incredible time looking back on it. It's hard for Americans to think now. I mean, we had some of the most senior members of an administration, some of the Justice Department, go to prison, being charged with serious crimes and there was fear. There was fear on my part that we were going to go to jail.

I mean, that sounds crazy, but I thought, man, these people will put us in jail. They can do anything. I mean you couldn't trust the FBI, you couldn't trust the Justice Department and you couldn't trust your government, was our feeling. It didn't affect…because we were only interested in one thing. Why did the President –?

In other words, we had to sort of separate all of these out from our duty, but we're citizens and we're living in Washington, DC. There's no doubt we felt we were all tapped and under some kind of investigations. I mean, we just took that as our course, that that's sort of the environment and we just had to be extreme cautious on how we conducted business.

Naftali: Did you have some conversations outdoors so that you wouldn't be heard?

O'Brien: Oh, I had conversations everywhere. I don't remember. You're just cautious on what you said, but I wasn't so worried about that, but I thought…I never served the government again. I thought that was the most…it was obviously an extraordinary experience, but I

couldn't do that again. The pressure was just so overwhelming on everybody. Forget me – and I had the least of the pressure.

It was on all these people, but it just was you were drained at the end. You were just an enormously draining…and not a very happy experience. It wasn't a very happy experience. There was nothing pleasurable about doing this. You don't look back and say, "Well, that was a great job." It wasn't a great job. I thought my responsibilities were the least of all. I was a young staffer. It was these members.

I don't think anybody thought it was a great experience. I think they think historically they did an incredible thing – this process to go through and that the American public accepted this process – but I never heard a member say this was on a personal level sort of one of their highlights.

Naftali: Do you remember anything from the moments after Article One was passed? Where were you?

O'Brien: I think I was in the back. I was in the Committee apartment. I don't remember.

Naftali: Did you know how the Chairman looked afterwards?

O'Brien: He was exhausted. That's all been public...he came back and he cried after it was over, just an emotional experience. It wasn't the only he had cried during the process, but it was a very emotional night that I remember.

Naftali: Can you recall another time he cried?

O'Brien: Well, he's Italian so he's very emotional. So he cried a number of times. There were a couple of other times that he had tears sort of through the experience. I think the pressure, the emotion of the whole process, sort of the darkest days of this process where there was just a lot of pressure on all of us, but then there's another piece…when I told them that this was going be televised. That's another story.

O'Brien: That's what I meant by institutionalist.

Naftali: During the break I asked and I wanted to repeat your question was how the Congressman's views of President Nixon shaped the way that you handled this?

O'Brien: No, I don't think so. I think clearly he's a Democrat and clearly he would vote for a democratic Presidential candidate, but when this

obligation was thrust upon him, his view was the institution of the Presidency and being who he was he had just extraordinary respect and awe for the Presidency. This was the center of everything that he believed in as a patriot.

So Nixon in a sense was just a holder of that institution, but he felt what he was being asked to do and what his Committee and the House was being asked to do, what Congress was being asked to do is to view a holder of this institution, but he felt the institution above all had to be protected. He didn't have the visceral feelings about Nixon, I think, as I said earlier

I think there was some disappointment when he heard the tapes, but those are personal disappointments about his language and that he felt wasn't very Presidential, but he didn't have that partisan anger that was so prevalent amongst many sort of anti-war or very liberal members of the Democratic Party.

He never voiced that kind of view this was before or after, but he voiced with great disappointment that he felt that this individual would abuse the office. That was more of a disappointment in President Nixon than anything else.

Naftali: How important was the fact that he was an immigrant?

O'Brien: Extremely important. I think it formed his whole view that here was an opportunity as a young man to be an immigrant to come to this country. It's all the clichés. He embodied all the clichés of you could grow up to be anything. He worked really hard at this. As a young man, the stories are that he would go out and practice speech making.

He would put marbles in his mouth as I think probably something – the Greeks or Aristophanes or somebody did –, but to be able to enunciate, he wanted to be American. That's what he wanted. He wanted to be an American. He wanted to sound, talk and be an American and be a patriot.

Long before it meant anything, always wore a little flag in his lapel. It wasn't like a signal whether you were liberal or conservative. It was a patriot. I think that, again, became very important historically acts of history. Here he was always like groomed; he was groomed for this for this task.

Naftali: Thank you. Tell us about the decision to put cameras in.

O'Brien: He always said to me that I wound up have to deal with all the…I never met a press person in my life until I got to the office. I had

no contact with press people. Every day out in front of the office would be 25 or 30 press people every day following the case. They'd follow Rodino. They'd follow Doar, just everybody else, but I must say, just the quality of the press corps was extraordinary at this time, extraordinary human beings in their own right.

Some of the great reporters of our time covered this story. He always said to me and that sort of was left to me that all the press contacts, press conversations, once in a while you would get a conversation with the Chairman and John Doar. Let's say and all the press would make fun of it because they had no information, but we'd do it and once in a while.

We'd have a little press gathering, but it was important because the Congressman kept saying, "Remember you have to explain to the public what we're doing. This is how you explain it you don't get leaks or anything like that," so on a regular basis, we had to let the public know what's going on, what the process is, very important, the process, why this is being done.

As this was going on, I just sort of thought in my mind, well, this is going to be televised, obviously. I mean when the hearings actually take place, the American public has to view it. It was very interesting. I was very formed by the Watergate Hearings. If you remember, during the hearings, it was very chaotic cameras and all that kind of stuff. I had this vision, eventually by the way, I went in the movie business.

I got this visual idea that I wanted the public and I talked to the Congressman a lot about this, too, that when we as citizens came in to view this. I wanted them to feel intimacy that they and their members were in a conversation in a sense. That they were talking to them. I wanted everything that remotely looked like a television or a cable, I want it gone. I had this very clean view. You can imagine doing this today.

I went to the networks and I went to New York met with all the network Presidents and I said, "This is my vision." This is some kid from Ohio. I had a vision, so I had a vision. I said, "This is my vision. I want this. I don't want any cameras." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I want no cameras." They proceeded, of course. I was taken to task for this because I had not asked for the Speaker's approval.

The Committee Room was on the first floor, so I had them build behind the Committee because I would not allow cameras I did not want any cameras behind the members where you and I could see

them. They had to build a room outside the building where they would place the cameras and all the equipment. Then there were little curtains behind the members and then they would have little holes and there would be none of these wires. Then in that back of the room there would be a stand built which then you'd get the view of the Committee.

They bought all this at their own expense. They said, "Absolutely." If you look at it, if you look at the hearings on television, I doubt if you'll see any cameras, television cameras, but that was sort of the idea, but that's sort of the mechanics of how it was done. The important thing is they're televised. Once this had already been cast, I know John was very nervous about this decision. That it just made him very nervous that he thought this was going to be televised. That I remember.

Congressman was less…I mean this is his world. This is what he had dealt with, what else are you going to do? This is the age we live in, but then the decision was made we would televise and, of course, the rest is the rest. There was some discussion around that, but it was all after it was all done.

Naftali: Francis, got to ask you this. You told us about the role that the Congressman plays as the Chairman. Did the Chairman want it to be televised?

O'Brien: I can't recall.

Naftali: It fits because you're smiling.

O'Brien: He wanted the public to understand, but he came from an era before television. So I guess if he had his sort of wishes, I suppose he may have chosen something else, but –

Naftali: Francis, are you telling us that you went to New York and met with network executives without already having permission to even televise these things?

O'Brien: There was a lot of pressure. There was a lot of pressure. No decisions were made. I did go to New York. I did meet with all the executives. I did meet with the correspondents and all that kind of thing and had this, yes I did, but it was a fact gathering undertaking.

Naftali: That was a pretty gutsy thing to do.

O'Brien: Again, yeah, but this came out of a relationship, I think, with the Congressman. In other words, in my role as a staffer, never, ever

would I have done anything that was not, I think, without his approval in the sense of understanding what his core was and, though, I think because he constantly said to me, "This is a public. This must be approved by the country, by the citizens of the country." I just don't think he ever carried it to that. In other words, I felt very strongly that I was carrying out his wishes. I just don't think he understood the technology – how to do that. I just closed that gap.

Naftali: Was this an O'Brien Brothers idea?

O'Brien: No, I can't blame my brother for this. This was my idea. I can't believe the networks did this, but –

Naftali: Well, what I wondered because when you describe the Doar selection process, when you describe the Doar selection process, it's a little improvised. There's something very professional about this vision for the room. Where did you get it? I mean was something you wanted? Had you been interested in production before?

O'Brien: No, no and I think back and now you reach a certain age, I think some things you're just good at and some things you're not. I think I was lucky enough to be…I was born with certain…I don't know how you wind up with certain skills. They're not intellectual skills, but I have good people skills. Not that I'm a good communicator, but I have people skills even at that age.

I think I had a great mentor in the Congressman. I've learned so much that I carried it the rest of my life. I don't know why. In other words, I look back and I don't think I'd have made the same decisions today. I don't think I would have done the things and maybe it's youth. So looking back you say, "Wow, that was a good decision," but the answer is I don't know how it winds up that way why you're good at things or not good or that.

I wasn't interested in production or anything. I just knew what bothered me about the Watergate Hearings were all these cameras and I just felt it was a little circusy for me. That was all. I thought it was a common sense. Again, it's not my hearing. It sort of fit his demeanor. I always had to put myself in his and I think I'm pretty good at that.

I'm very good at putting myself into other people's place and I think that's what I represented. I thought that's what he is. In other words, it reflected him. It reflected the institution, again, his great

respect for the institution that's how and why would he know how to do that. I didn't know how to do it, but –

Naftali: Now, you brought up this issue of televising of the proceedings when I asked you about the Congressman showing emotion. I mean, that's how you brought it up –

O'Brien: Did I? I don't remember.

Naftali: Yeah. My point is that did he show emotion when –?

O'Brien: Yeah, they were pretty upset. He and John were very upset with me when I told them. I got yelled at. Did you get taken to the woodshed? John took me to the woodshed, if you can imagine, and the Congressman took me to the woodshed.

Naftali: For talking to the executives?

O'Brien: For making this decision. It's already done.

Naftali: Wait a second, I thought it was a fact finding mission.

O'Brien: It was being built, okay.

Naftali: I'm sorry, I shouldn't –

O'Brien: Oh yeah. I got yelled at there's no doubt about it I got yelled at, okay. I got really yelled at.

Naftali: What did the Committee members think?

O'Brien: We never asked them.

Naftali: They didn't know they were going to be on TV?

O'Brien: I have no idea. I can't remember.

Naftali: We have to tell the audience because they won't know this. This is a C-span world. Congress wasn't televised.

O'Brien: No, there was nothing on television ever. Watergate, the Watergate Hearings were on, right. Again, all the Congressman kept saying to me all year – and he said it to everybody; it wasn't like he said it to me – was this decision, whatever it may be, had to be approved by the American citizens. I'm thinking how else would you do this?

There had to be a sense of openness. There had to be a sense. I mean he had me going out every day to meet with all these press people and keeping them informed without talking about the proceedings. There has to be some extraordinary trust that I had to

build up with this generation of reporters, number one. Clearly, things were said that never got –

You had to give people context so and there were important institutional papers the *New York Times* and all these papers. You had to deal with them and you had to give them context constantly so that the great reporters like Jim Naughton, Bill Kovach, there were a whole…actually, it's interesting *The Post* was not one of the major…they were the major paper on the Watergate, but they didn't quite understand this wasn't an investigation.

In other words, they sort of missed reporting on the impeachment because it wasn't an investigation. It wasn't a Bob Woodward, Bernstein kind of an investigation. We were not uncovering facts. It was a process so the reporters and organizations that stepped forward were people who understood process much better, but again, you had the Congressman kept saying, "You can't leave people in the dark. You have to, in proper time, keep people informed."

I had to keep the members informed. In other words, you had to move everybody along at the same time. My job sort of wound up sort of dealing with the outside world and his job was to deal with the inside world.

Naftali: Did you deal with Woodward or Bernstein?

O'Brien: No, very rarely, two or three times. Bob Woodward came and told me, whispered those things in my ear. I said I have no idea what he's talking about and so he went away.

Naftali: By the way, was Elizabeth Drew, one of the people that you asked for a recommendation for –

O'Brien: I don't remember. It could have been. She's still a very close friend. Mary McGrory, I might have asked Mary. She was a great reporter in her time.

Naftali: Daniel Schorr?

O'Brien: No, he was too investigative reporter for that. I grew to like Dan Schorr a lot, but he was. No, there was a whole group of – Jack Nelson who was a great civil rights reporter. It wound up there was a generation of reporters and that's when John Doar became so important. There was a whole generation of reporters – Bill Kovach, Jack Nelson and others who went south in those early 60's and covered the civil rights movement. Who then became bureau chiefs and senior reporters and those are the people, we had

a great rapport with them, but the point is that's irrelevant. What's relevant is you had to keep the public informed as you moved along.

Naftali: I'm going to move to some things that might have not been O'Brien decisions.

O'Brien: Thank God.

Naftali: The decision not to investigate, to actually base the whole proceeding on the work done by the Watergate Special Prosecution Force, the Senate Watergate Committee.

O'Brien: I don't know how. I remember that that was a decision made, but that was a decision made and I was sitting there, but sort of that was way above me kind of thing. I didn't understand, but that was the decision made within the Committee, within the leadership of the House and with the staff. They came to that conclusion, but I think they thought they had everything. First, I don't think they had the manpower. I don't think we had the wherewithal to do an original investigation I believe, but that's –

Naftali: But you could have hired more people.

O'Brien: Could have, I just don't remember now. You'd have to ask others that were in a better position than I was.

Naftali: The decision to issue a subpoena, at least one, that must have been hard. There were some people who did not want –

O'Brien: Very hard. I remember, again, I would be an observer in a situation like that. When those discussions took place, extremely intense – I think some of the members and the lawyers that you will interview or have interviewed will talk about that. Just very intense, again, not arguing, but just you didn't know what to do. These are and that's how Rodino treated everything. Everything was momentous.

I mean, again, you had to respect the Presidency. You had to respect the institution and you had to respect the person that held that job was President Nixon. So everything was dealt with in that context. He set the tone. So you just don't willy-nilly send a letter to the President or subpoenas or whatever. You just don't do that without a lot of thought, a lot of forethought.

Naftali: Do you think he was reluctant?

O'Brien: Sure, he was reluctant. He was very reluctant. I mean, yes, he was reluctant to do it because it was precedent setting. It was a large decision. He was very reluctant.

Naftali: Do you think that Mr. Doar had to convince him?

O'Brien: Yes. I think John had to present the case. He had to, as a good lawyer will, he had to present why this was critical. Yes, absolutely.

Naftali: Do you remember the decision to re-transcribe some of the tapes because the transcripts weren't very good or it was felt they weren't good?

O'Brien: Yeah, I remember that, but I just remember, that it happened.

Naftali: Since you did not know how process would go, tell us about the effect of the Supreme Court decision, the unanimous decision against the President to release the tapes.

O'Brien: I think it was a jolt to the Committee. This is more of a member issue. In other words, I think that was like a 'wow' moment. Wow, W-O-W, wow. I mean it just and I think it had a powerful impact on the Republicans. That's all I remember.

Naftali: Do you remember ever playing the smoking gun tape?

O'Brien: No.

Naftali: Do you remember the effect of the transcript of the smoking gun tape?

O'Brien: Yes.

Naftali: Do you remember the effect on the Chairman?

O'Brien: Nothing. I mean he absorbed it. I remember we talked about it one evening and just it was a rather matter of fact conversation. I remember that kind of thing. I was like sort of flabbergasted. I can remember myself.

I was sitting there thinking, man, wow, because they just reported this and it was all I can remember, my vague memory. It was all very matter of fact. There was John and I think a couple of the other lawyers were there. It was a matter of fact conversation. That's all I remember, but in my mind I'm thinking, wow, this is really important.

Naftali: Nobody knew the President was going to resign, so you had to think about presenting to the House. What was the next step supposed to be?

O'Brien: Actually, I had already started. I went over and met with Mr. Mansfield – what does this mean; what's the process? He sent me off just to meet with –

Naftali: You meant to talk with the Senate.

O'Brien: Yeah, to talk about the Senate. I went over there a couple of times. I think there was preparation. I know there was preparation. I was not involved in those conversations. For some reason he wanted me to go start talking to the Senate before his staff did or the Committee. I remember I had a couple of conversations with Mr. Mansfield's staff.

Naftali: Can you recall any?

O'Brien: Just procedural, again, what's the process. I was sent on sort of a fact finding – how are you going to go about this; if this comes here, what does it mean, that kind of thing. I think he didn't want any sort of connection from the staff because he didn't want to give the impression that all of a sudden it was a done deal and it was going over to the Senate. He wanted some very informal conversation. I think he was just looking for knowledge.

Naftali: This was before the votes?

O'Brien: Yeah.

Naftali: Was there a time table when was the House supposed to vote, again, it never happened because the President resigned?

O'Brien: Sometime that fall.

Naftali: There were going to be a few months because, of course, your votes were at the end of July so you were going to go into an August recess –

O'Brien: Come out in the fall.

Naftali: Oh my goodness, this would have been a drawn out process.

O'Brien: Well, we didn't know…in other words, we just assumed that, again, nobody had been through this before so we don't know what the House would have done. In other words, if once it left our hands, it's like that. It leaves your hands. In other words, this goes to the full House then and other people start taking control. Now this is now that time table is no longer the Chairman's time table.

So we just had to start making assumptions and preparing, but what conversations did play and there was a lot of conversations,

by the way, with the Speaker and with Mr. O'Neil about…I mean they had to start preparing for this if this was going to happen, but I sort of mentally thought I guess there would have been an August break and then you just didn't know. So we thought it would be pretty soon after the vote, but we always thought September.

Naftali: Then it would go to the Senate.

O'Brien: Yeah, at the end of the year. What conversations we had, he always thought this would be done by that year.

Naftali: You mean the trial would occur in the Senate by the end of the year?

O'Brien: If in fact…if in fact it…the steps to move forward, he was found charged and then tried that the process he thought would be over. He guessed that was just random conversations, no one knew.

Naftali: Did anyone know if the inquiry, your staff, would play a role?

O'Brien: Don't know. I don't remember those conversations. You'd have to ask the staff.

Naftali: Did the Congressman edit the Statements of Information? Did he actually go through and make suggestions to –

O'Brien: Uh-mm, you mean on the charges? I mean on the –

Naftali: First of all, I meant just the material. Did he edit the Articles of Impeachment?

O'Brien: Uh-mm, he did and I can't because I don't know, but yes, they would bring over and they'd talk and he would talk about this and this wording and that wording, what does this mean and that kind of. Yeah, there was editing and other members, too. It was not –

Naftali: Did he want to get rid of a few of these Articles because he thought that they wouldn't –

O'Brien: He thought some were, again, he put it through the political prism of the process. I thought he and I can't remember. I mean he was stronger about some than others.

Naftali: I'm referring to the one about the secret bombing of Cambodia, which was the Fourth Article. The Fifth was the taxes.

O'Brien: He thought that was too political.

Naftali: The Cambodia one.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Naftali: What about the taxes that the President set up?

O'Brien: I don't remember. I remember the Cambodia thing came up. We thought we'd play right into a partisan kind of anti-war. It doesn't matter what we were or the members of the Committee, he just thought that was outside. He wasn't comfortable.

Naftali: But he couldn't prevent it.

O'Brien: No, he couldn't, but you asked me what he thought.

Naftali: So do you think it was something he did to appease the more liberal?

O'Brien: Yeah, he had to. Put it to a vote, his judgment would be not to do it, but that wasn't his call.

Naftali: Part of the pressure on him and you mentioned this to me off camera, but we didn't talk about it. You said that the White House tried to mob him up. What did you mean?

O'Brien: Right, Italian American from Newark, New Jersey, it's the cliché that Italians are mob connected political people. There was a lot of corruption out of Newark. His roommate…now, let me be correct, it was Congressman Addonizio that was a Congressman and became Mayor, went to prison. There were a lot of politicians out of the wards of Newark and surrounding area who went to prison and were found to have connections with organized crime.

The White House immediately upon once the process began started putting stories out that he was influenced or in some way connected to the families, the crime families of New Jersey. We had to answer this on a regular basis. We had to deal with this issue almost every day in the early days. Papers put major investigations on this.

I do believe it was finally the *Wall Street Journal* came forward with a story just ending this. There actually was a tape. There was a series of tapes. There was a tape they uncovered, must have been FBI tape or some tape that they uncovered that where he is brought up in the tape and I don't remember exactly, but the clear implication of the tape is that he's not one of us. That was it.

There was a story in the *Wall Street Journal* and others, but very, very, intense from sort of summer – started back with Vice President Agnew right through the fall into the winter we had to

deal with these constant stories of his reported connections to organized crime.

Naftali: How did you become convinced that the White House was behind some of it?

O'Brien: I don't know. Who else would be? I mean, it's sort of logic. I mean who else? Where would these stories and reporters would come to you and say, "We just heard this." We knew where it was coming from. There was nothing you could do about it you just had to stand up and say here this is who he is. This is his record. These are his finances. You had to put your palms up, as we say.

Naftali: One of the other decisions that the Chairman had to make was whether to call witnesses to be interrogated or interviewed. Nine people were interviewed. Chuck Colson. Do you remember how that came about? What role the Chairman played besides making the call?

O'Brien: Well, he made the call to do it. There was a strong staff feeling, I think, that they had to call these people. I never partook in any of those because that was a Committee issue. I wasn't permitted to be in those there is no reason to be in those. I don't remember any of the meetings themselves.

Naftali: Where were you when you found out that President Nixon was going to resign?

O'Brien: We were sitting in our office in the Rayburn Building with the Congressman, had a little TV set right there. We got a call, could have been from St. Clair. We got a call from someone that the President was going to go on television. I'm trying to remember – nine o'clock; I forget – and resign. We were just in utter shock. I guess we were sitting there that night, nobody said anything. We were just in shock. It never entered our minds, ever. At least none of the people I –

Naftali: You thought the President would fight right to the trial.

O'Brien: Why wouldn't he? He didn't show any signs…I mean, there was just nothing. It sort of took our breath away.

Naftali: What did you think of the pardon?

O'Brien: I thought it was an injustice. I thought it was wrong. To this day, I'm just; it's one of those head butts. I didn't think we let the process carry itself out, and I thought that it was I just thought that it was wrong.

Naftali: Did you ever have a conversation with Congressman Rodino about this pardon?

O'Brien: Mm-hm, he understood it, but he didn't think it was right. But he was, he understood it, he understood President Ford's motivation. Most of us put this past – let's get this country healed. But again, you go back, what I've said often, in this conversation, he was very much of a process person. He thought you let the system carry forward, but he wasn't strong. He didn't have a, in other words, I had a much more visceral reaction than he did. I can remember this conversation we had, he just said, "I understand." But again, we knew very well and had a good relationship with President Ford. He said, "I understand how we have to move on." But he being institutionalism process person, he thought that was not the right decision.

Naftali: By the way, since we're talking about what Vice President Ford, later President Ford, before that Congressman Ford, do you remember the politicking around the selection of the Vice President, by the President, by President Nixon, and the fact that John Connally was his first choice?

O'Brien: Mm-hm.

Naftali: What do you recall?

O'Brien: I just remember it's all in the air, and then a lot of the conversation was, which we had sort to filter out, a lot of the conversation when he picked President Ford, because who would want him as President. That was a very common sort of thought at the time. It was irrelevant to us, but I remember Rodino, he liked Gerald Ford. He thought he was a fine, decent man. He knew him for years. That was sort of the common wisdom of the time. That it was a political move on the part and that would prevent the, our process of moving forward, because we have never forward with the idea that Jerry Ford could be President. So it didn't affect the Chairman at all.

Naftali: Did the Chairman like the final report of his committee, on the impeachment committee?

O'Brien: Mm-hm, he thought it was, I think again, I think he was greatly relieved that this was over, but he felt he fulfilled his obligation. I think he felt honored by the whole process. I think that he was honored to do it, but he thought he did, he thought he gave his best.

Naftali: Do you think that his relationship with Tip O'Neal and the Speaker of the House, Carl Albert, and others, did it change as a result of this process? Did they have more respect for him afterwards?

O'Brien: Oh, yeah. He had a very wonderful rest of his career. He was honored, he loved it, he **[inaudible]**. He was a Congressman from New Jersey, the loved the attention, he'd go to speaking and yeah, he was deeply, there was an aura about him, that he carried for the rest of his career. Again, retrospectively, all the members then, honored him. I remember I went to his funeral, and there was Paul Sarbanes, Charlie Rangel, people from, who had long gone in their own, had all their own distinguished careers, etc., and came back to pay him honor. Yeah, he was, he liked that.

Naftali: Can you give us a word picture of his, because, of course she died young, relatively young, what was Barbara Jordan like?

O'Brien: She was, I have no more to add than anybody. She was just wonderful. You liked to be with her. In other words, she would come into a room – she filled the room. You think, wow, there's some privilege, she just filled the room. She had the voice and all that was wonderful, but she was – she had a lot of energy. She was big and so you liked to be with her, because she was funny. She was again, she was just a freshman, so there that sort of distances, but again, the Chairman liked, who wouldn't like to be around Barbara Jordan. She was just fun, and she was smart, and he thought this, she thought, he thought, wow, what a wonderful career she had ahead of her. He always said that. "My goodness," he said, "This, this member is going to go far."

Naftali: Did the Chairman do anything at the end of the process, special, or to thank the staff?

O'Brien: Yeah, he thanked the staff. I don't' remember the, he thanked – I think he went down, because remember, he spent it sort of all went back to normal in the sense that all of a sudden all 125 people went away, whatever that number was and there it was.

Naftali: Did he go to the Congressional Hotel to see them, to see their offices sometimes?

O'Brien: Yeah, he went over, and he went over a number of times. He went over often, during the process, but again, there was a lot of bitterness, you've read the books, and the stories, of people who were very unhappy on the left with the process. Jack Brooks and

others were still Jerry Zeifman; others were I guess for years carried on, that they were unhappy with the way that this was conducted.

Naftali: What they wanted five articles being passed?

O'Brien: I don't know, you'd have to go back and they just they were unhappy. They just didn't feel he, he John Doar, were, what their choices and they didn't carry the process, as they would have. I don't know what that means. In other words, if you go back and look at it historically, I'm thinking, what other momentous event in our history has been sort of accepted by the American public. That's how the process was to work. But then listen it was a very, traumatic, undertaking so you're not going to get unanimous opinion on this.

Naftali: Do you think the process worked?

O'Brien: I think the process worked, brilliantly.

Naftali: You leave government, and then you go into the movie business. You had something to do Gallipoli?

O'Brien: Yes, I produced Gallipoli. I wanted to leave, it doesn't matter what I did. I remember, when you're young, you have wonderful mentors. I had Peter Rodino. I had another wonderful mentor named John Gardner, who was the founder of Common Cause, and I met him through this process and he was just a wise human being. And when this process ended I said, "What do I do with my life?" I said, I stayed in and he's the one that says, "Go reinvent yourself." He said, "Constantly reinvent yourself." He's just this wonderful man.

I decided I wanted to do something that was completely, not, this was it, I said, "I love, have great respect for government, I respect, I just don't want to do it again." It was such a traumatic undertaking, and I said – so I spent a year at John, again John Gardner was very wise and he guided me through this year and I talked to all kinds of people. I remember I went to IBM, up in New York, and they all wore black and shoes, they all fit into today actually. And it's interesting, I had interviews with people and they'd say, "Well, what have you done?" You'd go to a business, and, "What have you done?" I'm thinking, wow, I just did something, but it didn't' count. It did matter. I didn't' have an accountant degree, or a law degree but then, I got attracted to the movie business.

Barry Diller was a pretty big, because they don't care who you are. It's sort of, you could, they didn't' care where you came from. That's what I love about the business, is just, it's true. You could work in the mailroom one year, and be president of the company. I just love the idea that there were no rules in the movie business. So I thought what a wonderful way to sort of drain myself of this world. Take a challenge I knew nothing about and go out.

I spent a number of wonderful years with – there was Barry Diller, Michael Eisner, Jeffrey Katzenberg. It was all a bunch of great people at the time at Paramount. We had a great time. Charlie Bluhdorn owned it, he was wonderful to deal with and then I went on. I left there, and I said that's enough of that. Louis Malle was a great, became great friends, Louis Malle.

I remember I was editing one of his scripts once, and again, it's like being in an impeachment, I didn't know nothing, so I'm editing one, so he looks up at me and he goes, "Francis, you don't know shit," he says, and we became great friends. He said, because I had no idea, and I still don't. I was sitting there editing Louis Malle's, script.

But anyway, I loved it, and I left I said, "This is wonderful," and headed out to Australia, because there was a lot of young, interesting, dynamic, filmmakers coming out of Australia, and I thought it would be fun. Then we came across the story that eventually became *Gallipoli*. I had to get money. I had to get financing. I got money from who was, he's still alive, a guy named Bob Stigwood, who was manager of the Bee Gees, and others. He produced Saturday Night Fever, Grease, and all those. And then the other half he told me, now go find the rest of the money. Back out in Australia, I met this little newspaperman, who owned a bunch of newspapers, and he thought movies were frivolous, and totally frivolous, because he was a newspaperman. I knew something that he knew, but we never talked about it, but he gave me half the money, because his father was the most instrumental person on telling the world about this tragedy of Gallipoli. Of course, it was Rupert Murdoch. So that was an extraordinary experience. Then I went on to do other things.

Naftali: You knew that about Rupert Murdoch's father before you met Rupert Murdoch.

O'Brien: We never talked about it. In fact, when we started to go find money, because doing our research, Peter and I, when we were

doing research, we said, "This is how the story's got to be told." Because Murdoch was a reporter, and he snuck out with all the dispatches to London, and the *Times* in London repeated. So we knew that, so when I went to pitch the story, I told him it was Gallipoli, he never said a word, and I never said a word, because why would he – I mean he had such a big empire, why would he waste his time on just a little, frivolous film, that was just peanuts to him. Of course, what it was, I tapped into an honor, with him.

Naftali: Peter Weir was the one who brought Mel Gibson.

O'Brien: Yes, he found Mel Gibson. He was a – Mel Gibson who's had an interesting career. He was an American; born upstate New York, went to Australia when he was ten, and had been in a few minor films and we saw him on stage actually; he was in a play, and you actually could not understand. His Australian accent was so thick, that we sort of had to give him American lessons, when we did the film. He was, but you could tell then, extraordinary potential. But Peter found, yeah Peter, was also an extraordinary director. He was a wonderful person to deal with. So that was another sort of one-off experience that was a fabulous experience for me.

Naftali: Did you do *Breaker Morant*?

O'Brien: No, that was done – Bruce Beresford directed that, and it was done almost at the same time. It was done before Gallipoli, actually. By a director called Bruce Beresford.

Naftali: You want to mention another film you did.

O'Brien: No, that's it.

Naftali: This has been wonderful.

O'Brien: Thank you.

Naftali: Have I forgot, have I missed?

O'Brien: No.

Naftali: Have we missed a story, from the impeachment story, that you would implement.

O'Brien: No, I'm in so much God damn trouble now with this story, with this TV shit, oh man. Thank God, Peter's dead.

Naftali: Thank you very much for you time Francis, this has been wonderful. Thank you.

O'Brien: Thank you everybody. I Appreciate it.