



JOHN JOSEPH Moakley

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John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project

Oral History Interview with

John Joseph Moakley

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Interview Summary

Congressman John Joseph Moakley, who served the Ninth District of Massachusetts from 1973 through 2001, discusses his life and political career. This interview covers what it was like to grow up in South Boston in the thirties and forties; his military service in the Navy during WWII; how he became involved in local politics in the fifties; his career as a member of the Massachusetts General Court during the fifties and sixties; his memories of Suffolk University Law School and his law practice; his late wife Evelyn; how the city of Boston has changed during his career in public office; his thoughts regarding the Boston school desegregation in the seventies; his campaigns for congressional office; his career working in Washington D.C.; his work in El Salvador as chairman of a special task force following the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter; and his work to help improve conditions in Cuba. He ends by remembering important figures that helped shape his career and giving his own advice for future elected officials.

Subject Headings

Boston (Mass.)

Cuba

El Salvador

Massachusetts Politics and Government

Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001

O'Neill, Tip, 1912-1994

South Boston (Boston, Mass)

Suffolk University Law School

United States. Congress.

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This interview took place on April 2, 2001, at Congressman Moakley's district office
in South Boston, MA.

Interview Transcript

(Interview begins during casual conversation)

CONGRESSMAN JOHN JOSEPH MOAKLEY: Unless it's getting right down to the wire and we're in contention somewhere, then I'm an avid sports fan.

PROFESSOR JOSEPH McETTRICK: In high school football in those days, did they have you play offense/defense?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah. We played everything.

(interruption)

PROFESSOR ROBERT ALLISON: To follow this up, you played hockey and football. Where would you play when you were a kid? I mean not when you got on the team.

MOAKLEY: Oh, down at Columbus Park; they used to flood the park in the wintertime and it would freeze over, and you'd go ice skating. Of course ice skates were very, very expensive in those days, and your parents would always buy them three sizes too big anyway, and you'd be on your ankles all day long, and by the time you grew into the shoes, you probably couldn't walk anyway.

But you know, when I was growing up as a kid everything was unorganized. I mean, every corner had a baseball team. Every corner had a football team. Every corner had some kind of a pickup situation. And the Columbus Park, fifty-seven acre park in South Boston, right across from the projects where I grew up, that was the place we all met.

McETTRICK: Did you have a chance much to get out on the water?

MOAKLEY: Well, not a boat—I like to swim. I bought a boat when JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] got assassinated, and I had it about two years, and then I took up golf, and I didn't have time for the boat, so I got rid of the boat.

ALLISON: What kind of a boat was it?

MOAKLEY: It was a thirty-two foot sports Ulrichsen lapstrake, three-quarter inch lapstrake mahogany, 310-grade marine engine; but they're a lot more fun riding in someone else's than owning your own I'll tell you.

ALLISON: It's an expensive hobby?

MOAKLEY: Well, you know, you're never through with it, and then in the wintertime, you're scraping it, and in the summertime you're equipping it, you know, and then you can't go out by yourself, so you invite everybody and you feed them and give them the fishing poles. You go fishing up till about seven o'clock at night; you come back, and you're there till midnight unsnarling the lines. I figured there were more important things to do with my time.

McETTRICK: I guess we were interested in what it was like growing up in South Boston, and what your parents did, and where did you hang out in the neighborhood? Tell us a little bit about your growing up in Southie.

MOAKLEY: Well growing up in the thirties, everybody was poor, but we just didn't know it. Pre-television, so that there was nothing to keep you in the house, so life really existed on the streets, the street corners. And you learned to bond with one another. You learned your strengths and weaknesses. You learned what life was really about just being on the street corners. And I think a lot of my political acumen comes from the ability that I developed just hanging on street corners and knowing, what was the right thing to do, what was the wrong thing to do, and how best to achieve an end.

McETRICK: So where were you living when you first remember growing up in South Boston? Had the project been built yet, or where were you?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. The project was built in '38, and my father, my mother, and my two brothers were one of the first people in the projects. But we grew up on Dorchester and Old Colony Avenue, Dorchester Street and Old Colony Avenue, over a hardware store. And I figured that's where I got my nuts and bolts politics from the hardware store. (laughter)

ALLISON: Is it still there?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. It's there. In fact, I told someone that someone just bought the house I was born in. He says, "Are they going to make a national shrine out of it?" I said, "No. They're going to tear it down and make a garage out of it." (laughter)

ALLISON: So what was it like moving into the projects?

MOAKLEY: Actually, it was a delight. I mean, gee, we moved into a brand new building, and we really had ice cube trays then. You know, you could make your own ice cubes and you had heat. I mean up until then the only heat we had was the oven in the kitchen. We didn't have any central heat, and when you get up out of bed, you had to run like hell, open the oven door and put your feet in, so you wouldn't freeze to death. But we lived there from '38 to '41, '42.

McETRICK: How large was your family?

MOAKLEY: It was my father, mother, and three sons.

McETRICK: And you're the oldest?

MOAKLEY: I was the oldest, yeah.

McETTRICK: So where did you go to elementary school?

MOAKLEY: I went to John Boyle O'Reilly School, which is now an elderly housing, and then I went to the Thomas N. Hart School, which is now elderly housing, and then I went to South Boston High School, and then I quit when I was in my third year when I was fifteen; forged some papers, joined the navy. This was in the middle of World War II. Did three years and then came back, went to prep school, went to college, went to law school.

ALLISON: Did the navy ever find out that you had forged the paper?

MOAKLEY: No. In fact there's a group that's been incorporated, it's about underage veterans of World War II.¹ I joined up when there was two of them in the Congress, Mike Mansfield,² the son of Mike Mansfield, when he was younger. But it was a great experience.

I was taking up sheet metal in South Boston. You know in those days, we had a caste system in the city of Boston. If your father was a doctor or a lawyer or dentist; you were going to be a doctor, lawyer or dentist. If your father was a dock worker or a longshoreman or a sheet metal worker, you were going to be that. I mean there was no crossing. The only opportunity you had is--when we got out of the service, we had the GI Bill of Rights,³ and some of us took advantage of it, and broke the mold.

McETTRICK: When you went to South Boston High, did you have any part-time jobs? What did you do after school?

MOAKLEY: Not really. As I said, I quit there when I was fifteen, so I was in the cooperative course; that meant that I was taking sheet metal, so they used to send us out to work in some of the shops at thirty cents an hour, but that was part of the school training.

¹ The Veterans of Underage Military Service was incorporated in Ellicott City, Maryland, in 1991 by Allan Stover. (See <http://www.oldvums.com/> for more information)

² Michael Joseph "Mike" Mansfield (1903-2001), a Democrat, represented Montana in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1943 to 1953, then in the U.S. Senate from 1953 to 1977. He entered the navy at age 14 during World War I, served for nineteen months, then spent one year in the army and two years in the Marine Corps.

³ The GI Bill of Rights, officially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided, among other benefits, government compensation for the educational costs of returning World War II veterans.

McETTRICK: Were there any teachers at South Boston High School, parish priests or a cop on the beat, or anybody in particular that comes to mind when you think about when you were younger? Anybody that had any influence on you, or someone that you looked up to?

MOAKLEY: Well, yeah, I had one teacher that was a math teacher—and I was kind of an outspoken kid in high school. They'd call it fresh today. He chastised me a few times, but I had great respect for him. Even when I was in the service, I'd write him a note or two.

McETTRICK: What parish was the family living in then?

MOAKLEY: Well we went from Saint Augustine's when we lived on Dorchester Street, to Saint Monica's when we lived in the project, and when we moved up to the Point,⁴ we were in the (inaudible) parish, Saint Brigid's.

ALLISON: Where about on the Point did you move to?

MOAKLEY: 5A Bateman Place—it's upscale now; it's Bantry Way—and lived there for a couple of years. I guess it was cheaper to move than to pay rent. We lived in about eight places in the Ward before we settled down, I guess.

McETTRICK: So did the parishes have many activities for youth in those days, altar boys or—did you get involved in anything along those lines?

MOAKLEY: Well, as I said, every corner had something.

McETTRICK: So what was your corner? When you think of being on the corner or—

MOAKLEY: When I went to the Thomas N. Hart—it was a junior high school—H and Fifth Street.

⁴ The Point, or City Point, area of South Boston is located on the neighborhood's eastern side.

McETTRICK: Okay.

MOAKLEY: It was a corner I was—

McETTRICK: That was kind of your home?

MOAKLEY: That was the corner.

ALLISON: Do you ever see any kids that you remember?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. Every once in a while, I bump into—in fact, I remember one time I was playing golf in Oyster Harbors⁵ with a friend of mine and he wanted to take me back to show me his house, and they're all great houses down there. This fellow was well-off. We walked in, there were a lady and a man on the ladder fixing a drape, and so I said, "Hi. How are you?" So I come out, the fellow was down off the ladder. He says, "How you doing?" I said, "Good." He says, "You don't remember me, do you?" I said, "Gee, your face looks familiar, but, you know—" He said, "Babe Zarillo." I says, "Babe Zarillo?" I says, "The last time I saw you we were six years old. We had a fight in Cat Alley. Why would I remember you?" (laughter) You know, and "I remembered you," he said. Of course, he would remember; they see you on television. They hear you on radio.

But people are like that; they figure because they know what you look like, you should know what they look like, but that happens many times. Someone will say, "Do you remember me? Do you remember who I am?" and sometimes it's kind of embarrassing, because you don't want to minimize the fellow's importance. "Gee, I don't."

We had a congressman from one of the Midwestern states and he was kind of a hot ticket, and he was standing in a receiving line and one of the fellows come up—the same thing, grabbed him

⁵ The Oyster Harbors Club is located in Osterville, MA, which is one of the seven villages of the town of Barnstable on Cape Cod.

by the hand, and says, “You know who I am?” He says, “No. But let me get a police officer, maybe he can help you out.” (laughter)

McETRICK: So I suppose it must have been the situation when war started and probably a lot of your buddies were signing up for the Marines or the Navy, the Army, everybody was pretty much going in, I guess?

MOAKLEY: Oh, if you weren't around, you just couldn't imagine it. When the war broke out in '41, '42, '43, patriotism was flowing in the street. They actually closed recruiting stations, not because nobody showed up—it's because too many people showed up. They couldn't handle it.

I mean if you were walking down the street, and you looked like an able-bodied male, you would get killer looks from matronly women as much as saying, “Why aren't you in the service?” You know, it was a different—and everybody wanted to go. Everybody wanted to stop the madness going on in Europe.

McETRICK: So tell us about your signing up. How did that work? Where did you sign up? Did you have to go over to the army base or what was the—

MOAKLEY: The Fargo Building.⁶

McETRICK: The Fargo Building, okay.

MOAKLEY: Well I was running with an older group. I was running with kids two or three years older than me, because I was kind of a big kid. So I just mentioned to my father one day, I said, “Geez, you know, they're going to join the Navy next week. I think I'll go with them.” He said, “Okay.” So I come by and next week he drives up and he says, “Are you going someplace today?” I says, “No, they're going in town to a movie.” He says, “You're not.” I says, “What do you mean?” He says, “Well,” he says, “you said you were going to join the Navy. We got the papers here for you. Come on, let's go.”

⁶ The Fargo Building was located at 451 D Street in South Boston.

And my father joined the Coast Guard when he was younger, too. It just went in the family. And I think it was the best thing for me to do at the time, because I was at a crux in my life; if I didn't go and I stayed with sheet metal, I may not have got in the proper time and became a veteran. They give the GI Bill, so I'm one of the people that can say that I really benefited from World War II.

McETTRICK: So when you actually signed up, you went to the Fargo Building. Did they put you on a bus or a train, what happened next?

MOAKLEY: We had to go down to Camp Perry, Virginia.

McETTRICK: Okay.

MOAKLEY: And I was in charge of the forty people going down, because I enlisted. So I was Seaman Second Class; the rest of the people drafted, they were apprentice seamen. So I had to make sure that everybody was in line. And then when we went down to boot camp. We had military drill in those years in Boston, the schoolboy parade and all that.

McETTRICK: Oh yes, drills in high school, yeah.

(interruption)

MOAKLEY: Yeah

MCETTRICK: So tell us about boot camp.

MOAKLEY: So we went down to boot camp, and they line us all up, and the drill instructor says, "Anybody here have any military—have any marching experience?" I said, "Yeah." Because we had the schoolboys' parade. So I became an acting drill instructor at age fifteen, and

most of these guys were twenty-five or thirty, and, you know, “Your left, your right, the rear march.” So I did that for a lot of the time I was there.

It was intimidating because no matter how big you are, age is a very, very frightening thing. I mean when you’ve—people who are five, ten, fifteen years older than you, and you know they play mind games with you; you’re the boss, and they know you’re only a kid. So I mean it was not easy, but I got through it all right.

McETTRICK: Did you wind up in the Seabees?

MOAKLEY: I went in the Seabees, because I was color blind. I went in to take the color test, and I couldn’t fathom it. So they said, Okay, Seabee. I thought they meant color blind, but it’s—Seabees was just a construction part of the U.S. Navy. So I was assigned to the Stevedore Battalion, so that we used to go in and load and unload battle cargoes in the station in Pearl Harbor for about a year. And then we left there and went to Samar in the Philippines and then we left there, and we went to Japan.

McETTRICK: So when did you finally get out of the Navy? When were you discharged?

MOAKLEY: I got out on February 8, 1946. I did about thirty-five months. Then in those days there weren’t too many jobs around and most of the guys my age were in the service then. So my father used his power of persuasion once again to get me into school, which wasn’t my favorite place to spend any time, but I went, as I said, to undergrad, then law school, and that’s it.

ALLISON: You went to Newman Prep?

MOAKLEY: I went to Newman Prep, yeah, to get my high school marks. And then I went to the University of Miami for a year, took up sandpit playing and a few other little things.

ALLISON: What brought you down that way?

MOAKLEY: My father opened a café down there, so I went down there. While I was down there, I figured I'd look around and get moving, doing something.

McETRICK: So when you came back from the Navy, what was the political situation like in South Boston? Who were the political leaders—the senator and the rep? Because you must have kind of—

MOAKLEY: No, I really wasn't involved. I was just a kid out of the service, and what do I know? But the Johnny Powers⁷ and the Johnny Flahertys⁸ and Bob Linnehan and these were the—John Kerrigan⁹—these were the local politicians.

ALLISON: Bill Bulger¹⁰ mentioned the story of you telling him that politics interested you more than baseball.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah, Billy and I grew up in the projects a couple of years apart, but every once in a while we'd get together. I was already—well, no, I wasn't involved in politics then—I just said to him, one time, I said, “You know, I'm more interested in reading the back of political cards than I am baseball cards.” He said, “Ah! So am I.”

And of course in those days, again, the only activity in the streets were political torchlight parades. I mean, we couldn't wait for elections to come by, and you'd see these fifty cars going by with these red light flares hanging out the window and a big flatbed truck would pull up, and someone would get up and give a speech, and someone else would contest him. You know, it was activity. Everybody was attracted to it.

⁷ John E. Powers (1910-1998), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1939 to 1946 and in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1947 to 1964. He served as Senate President from 1959 to 1964.

⁸ John E. Flaherty (1910-2005), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts House of Representatives for three terms before being appointed clerk of South Boston District Court in 1945.

⁹ John E. Kerrigan (1907-1987) was first elected to the Boston City Council in 1933, serving three terms as its president. He was a member of the council for a total of thirty years and served twice as acting mayor of Boston, in 1938 and 1945. He also served two years in the State Senate.

¹⁰ William M. Bulger (1934-), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1962 to 1970, in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1970 to 1978 and as State Senate President from 1978 to 1996.

McETTRICK: How long were you down in Miami? You went to the University of Miami?

MOAKLEY: Just one year.

McETTRICK: One year, and then you came back to South Boston again?

MOAKLEY: Yes.

McETTRICK: Tell us about how you got talked into running for state representative. Was this someone on the corner, somebody suggested it?

MOAKLEY: No. In fact, I can remember like it was yesterday. I got on a Bayview bus at Knowlton Street, and I get on and I walked down the back of the bus and I sit down, and there's two fellows that I had played football with, Henry Doherty and Martin Carter, and I just got back from the University of Miami. And of course to them, that was quite a thing, because nobody in our group, not many people went to college.

So Marty says, "Why don't you run for city council?" I said, "What?" He says, "Ah! You're young, you're a veteran, someone our age—you know, we got to have somebody represent us," and Henry chimed in, he says, "Yeah." He says, "We need a veteran. Those old guys, they don't know." I wasn't interested. Then they had some other people who kind of piqued my curiosity, but I didn't go for it. The next year they said, "Look it. That state rep's fight, you got to go for it; they have more people," and I finally went for it. And it was a field of fifteen.

McETTRICK: Now was there a vacancy that year?

MOAKLEY: No. It was a field of fifteen and the fellow across the street from me got fourteen hundred votes, and I lost by 199. The following year I won. I topped the ticket. Ever since then, I've been topping the ticket.

ALLISON: Now were you campaigning in the torchlight parades?

MOAKLEY: Oh, absolutely. You get up at six o'clock in the morning and start knocking on the factory gates and the MBTA [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority] stations, you know, buttonholing people, knocking the doors. I think the first time I ran for rep, I knocked about three-quarters of the doors in the community.

ALLISON: Now what kind of issues would you have? You're telling me you're a twenty-three-year-old guy running for state rep.

MOAKLEY: It's very simple. When you're a young kid, you say, "Give a young man a chance," and then when you're there a few years, you go, "Experience counts." And, you know, everybody—most people like to give the young guy a chance. Politics, I think, is the only job that you can almost say experience is not necessary. I mean, they get tired of the guy in there. They get some fresh-faced kid, and they figure he's going to solve all the problems and he probably doesn't even know what the state house is.

McETTRICK: Would you say that campaigning for representative is pretty much the same today as it was in 1950 at that level?

MOAKLEY: Well, it's more slick today. Today you've got paid campaign managers, you've got paid pollsters. We would—a poll, I mean, all you would say is, "Please vote for me." Period. Issues—if you come from South Boston, it's got to be labor, you know. You've got to be with the working class.

In fact, when I was a kid, politicians were the guys that put the food on the table sometimes, and if there's a big snowstorm and the railroad people were hiring people to shovel snow, if you go down to your local politician, he'd give you a little white button; you'd put on and you'd go face the pick-up and the man up there picking the people would be picking all the guys with the white buttons, because they know that was Representative Kirby's or Representative Sullivan's guy. And, you know, that was a great job. You got about twenty cents an hour. But the politician was very much in the socioeconomic fiber of the community.

McETTRICK: Now when you ran, did you run in [wards] six and seven or was it just your own ward?

MOAKLEY: No. In those days ward seven had two reps. Ward six had one, so I ran in a double field, and it was Billy Carr¹¹ and Jimmy Condon were the incumbents, and then Billy Carr ran for school committee. Then there was an opening, then I took the opening.

McETTRICK: I think I saw somewhere in your website or someplace, describing the point at which you were a lifeguard at Carson Beach?¹²

MOAKLEY: Yeah, one summer.

McETTRICK: Was that after you came back from the service?

MOAKLEY: Yes. The first summer or something.

McETTRICK: Of course, like everything else I suppose, it helped to have someone's endorsement.

MOAKLEY: Oh, sure. Sure. Yeah. Get a letter from the senator, yeah.

McETTRICK: So then you went to the state house, finally, in '52, and what was the situation up there? Was it still Republican-controlled in the state house then?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. When I got elected, Herter¹³ had just taken over. He beat Dever¹⁴ for governor. I think we had a Republican—yeah. Tip O'Neill¹⁵ had been a Democrat—Tip

¹¹ William F. Carr (1910-1988), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts House of Representatives before being elected to the Boston School Committee in 1953, where he served until 1958.

¹² Carson Beach is located on the South Boston shoreline of Dorchester Bay.

¹³ Christian A. Herter (1895-1966), a Republican, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1931 to 1942, then represented the Massachusetts' Tenth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives

O'Neill was the Democratic speaker. In 1952 he left the Mass. House and went to the U.S. House. Jack Kennedy¹⁶ left the U.S. House and went to the U.S. Senate. And I got elected to the Mass. House.

McETTRICK: So what were the issues up there in the state house in those days? That was the 240-member House. That was a really kind of a wild place I guess, in many ways.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

McETTRICK: What do you remember of that?

MOAKLEY: Well it was kind of wild, and politics was very tough and everybody was very lockstep for their party's position, and if the Democrats had more people, they'd win the vote. If the Republicans had more people, it was very hard to switch anybody on some of those issues.

McETTRICK: Oh, so it was very close between the parties?

MOAKLEY: Of course, it's a long way back. I forget what it was now, but it was a great learning place. You could watch some of the—there was a lot of debates in those days.

McETTRICK: So then you were in the House for several years?

from 1943 to 1953. He then served two terms as governor of Massachusetts, from 1953 to 1957, and as United States Secretary of State from 1959 to 1961.

¹⁴ Paul A. Dever (1903-1958), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1929 to 1935 and as governor of Massachusetts from 1949 to 1953.

¹⁵ Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (1912-1994), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Eleventh and, after redistricting, Eighth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1953 to 1987. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987. He also served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1936 to 1952.

¹⁶ John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Eleventh Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1947 to 1953, then represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1953 to 1960, when he was elected president.

MOAKLEY: I was in the House from '52 to '60. My last term I was the Majority Whip. Then I ran for the Senate against Senate president John Powers, which wasn't too smart, but, you know, I did it anyway, and I was successfully defeated. And I was out for four years.

McETTRICK: Who was the speaker you were the Whip for?

MOAKLEY: John Thompson.¹⁷

McETTRICK: John Thompson. And he reigned for quite a while as House Speaker?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah. But I just had it, and it was eight years and it was tough. So I ran for the Senate. I lost and four years later John Powers got appointed to some clerk's job, and I'd been out of office for four years now, so I ran for the Senate and took every precinct in every ward against incumbents, after being out for four years. And I liked the Senate very much.

Of course, you could do more, because you had more staff. Then one day I find out that John McCormack¹⁸ is not running for reelection. I think he announced on a Monday he was not a candidate. I announced on a Tuesday I was, and of course, all I had was a little piece of the district, just a senator from South Boston. And Louise Day Hicks,¹⁹ who was a very known figure for years, the front page of all the papers, cover of national magazines on the busing situation,²⁰ and it was a very tough fight, and I lost that one. Then I decided that Louise Day Hicks could get one-third of the vote in any primary because of her stand and what people

¹⁷ John Thompson (1920-1965), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts State House of Representatives from 1948 to 1964. He served as Speaker of the House from 1957 to 1964.

¹⁸ John W. McCormack (1891-1990), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Twelfth and, after redistricting, Ninth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1928 to 1971. He served as Speaker of the House from 1962 to 1971.

¹⁹ Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, served on the Boston School Committee from 1962 to 1967 (serving as chair from 1963 to 1965), ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty of Boston in 1967 and in 1971, and served on the Boston City Council before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1970. She represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District for one term.

²⁰ In his June 21, 1974, opinion in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* (379 F. Supp. 410). Judge W. Arthur Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had "intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation" in the Boston Public Schools. When the school committee did not submit a workable desegregation plan as the opinion had required, the court established a plan that called for some students to be bused from their own neighborhoods to attend schools in other neighborhoods, with the goal of creating racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. (See <http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/garrity2.html> for more information)

thought of her. So I lost to her in '70. In '72, when the fight was coming up again, I sat down and tried to get some of the people who were running. I said, "Look it, let's take a straw. Nobody is going to beat her if we put this kind of field out there."

Well, everybody had their own stairway to the stars and they said, No, no. I said, "Okay." So I just stepped out. I ran as an Independent. In those days you could still be enrolled as a Democrat and run as an Independent. In fact, they changed the law because of what happened to me. (laughter) In fact, I voted for Louise Day Hicks in that primary because if anybody won but her my whole strategy would have went down the drain. So when she was having a victory party in the primary; I was having a victory party in the primary. And then the—my strategy turned out to be right. So when the election came, I won by about thirty-five hundred votes.

McETTRICK: Would you say that busing really was, if not *the* issue, was really the driving force underneath that election?

MOAKLEY: Well, yeah. Busing—but yeah, I was against busing too, but I just couldn't march in the streets and scream and holler like some of the people were doing it, and that cost me, but hey.

ALLISON: Did it gain you anything with other people in the district?

MOAKLEY: I don't think so. On a Monday, I was picketed by six hundred whites. On a Tuesday, I was picketed by six hundred blacks. You know, I'm saying, "Where am I going here?" What happened was I lost—not that year—I lost South Boston one year, after I was in the Congress during busing, because a fellow running against me was, "You got to absolutely stop busing."

McETTRICK: What would you say about that whole era? What did that do to South Boston?

MOAKLEY: Oh, it split people up and many well-intentioned people—some of them are really not able to articulate properly—you know, were labeled as bigots, and then there were other

people who wanted to do the right thing, and they were almost thrown out of their homes. It was the worst political time that I have ever gone through in my life. Some days, I just didn't want to get up in the morning and put my shoes on. It was terrible, getting calls all during the night.

I had one young lady I went to the prom with—there were four of us. She just spat as I walked by one day. You know, those things are hard to take for me. Most people in this business want to be liked, and just to have people that you had a great friendship with and because of this—they're so involved and they can't see anything but their point. It's tough.

(interruption)

McETTRICK: So you finally got elected in '72? And you went down to Washington?

MOAKLEY: Mm-hmm.

McETTRICK: And John McCormack was no longer Speaker at that point?

MOAKLEY: No. He couldn't be Speaker if I got elected. I took his place.

McETTRICK: That was his seat?

MOAKLEY: Yeah.

McETTRICK: So who took over?

MOAKLEY: Carl Albert²¹ was the Speaker. But there was a little byplay. When I was running as an Independent, to some it was heresy that I gave up the party. I said, "I didn't give up the party." "Yeah, but you're not running as a Democrat." As a result, Louise Day Hicks was

²¹ Carl Albert (1908-2000), a Democrat, represented Oklahoma's Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1947 to 1977. He served as Speaker of the House from 1971 to 1977.

running for re-election as a Democrat. So she got the endorsement on the radio and TV from John McCormack, Tip O'Neill.

And so I'm fighting—and I bump into Tip one day, and I said, “Yeah, I'm running for Congress.” He said, “You'll never make it.” He said, “Nobody will want an Independent.” I said, “I'm going to make it. I'm going to be down there.” He says, “No, you won't.” He says, “Kid, you're drawing on a great reputation. You got a great reputation as a Democratic senator.” He said, “I don't know whatever made you run as an Independent.”

So I said to him—of course, he didn't understand the situation. So when I get elected, and I went down to Congress, Tip has got all the freshmen together in the room. He was seeking some votes—I don't know if it was for Whip or Majority Leader—and every time he'd see me, he'd look the other way. He figured, “This guy is going to kill me.” So finally when he couldn't move away, I just went over to him, I put out my hand, and I says, “Tip, I'm with you.” I says, “I understand the game. The ins are ins and the outs are outs.” I said, “I'm in now.” He put a big smile on. He put his arm around me, and he says, “You sure are;” the beginning of a great, great friendship. He became my mentor. He became my guardian down there. He ushered me on to the chairman of the Democratic Personnel Committee, who channels all the jobs down there, then went to Carl Albert and had me assigned to the Rules Committee my second term;²² that's how I moved up.

McETRICK: That was the year Vietnam was really going strong?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah!

McETRICK: Tell us about how that impacted you both in South Boston and in your role as a congressman.

²² Congressman Moakley was a member of the House Rules Committee from 1975 to 2001 and served as its chairman from 1989 to 1995.

MOAKLEY: Well I was ambivalent. I was strongly, you know, “My country, right or wrong.” And then I listened to some of the protesters, and then I listened to some of the college kids, and then I started changing. And Tip was the guy that really made the change, because Tip was [President] Johnson’s right-hand man, and he just—I remember one time, there’s a book that Tip is speaking about at Boston College, and the thing came up about Vietnam, and he said, “Look it, I’ve been briefed by generals. I’ve been briefed by everybody. I know we’re doing the right thing over there.” And there was a kid named Patrick McCarthy [who] stood up. He said, “Have you been briefed by the other side?” And he thought about it, and he thought about it, and then he went out with some of these generals, got them half-drunk and started getting the truth out of them and finding that a lot of the figures were falsified that they were giving, and then he changed his mind, and he and Johnson had a falling out. It was very, very tough.

ALLISON: Now that must have been a—you’re a Navy veteran from South Boston; coming out against the war must have been a difficult thing?

MOAKLEY: It was, but by that time, I think people started changing. It wasn’t—I remember down here on the docks, where students were thrown overboard by longshoremen, because they were Communists and all that stuff. And we were subjected to the terms—I mean, you’re either a pinko or a right-winger—I mean, terms that really don’t mean a hell of a lot, but they can squeeze you into it, and make a big fight out of it. It was very difficult.

ALLISON: How do you avoid it? I mean, you managed to—

MOAKLEY: Oh, no, I came out—when I got elected, I ran on the McGovern-Meek²³ amendment, and I wanted to pull our troops out, that we’ve been there long enough, and, you know, I saw what happened to O’Neill. And I figured, hey, we’re just spinning our wheels, lost a lot of our kids, over fifty thousand kids, and get nothing out of it.

²³ The amendment to which Moakley is referring is the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, which was proposed in 1970 with the stipulation that U.S. troops be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of 1970. The amendment failed.

McETTRICK: Did you detect at some point that the veterans' groups in Boston started to change their position or their outlook on the war? I mean, what—as a congressman, what could you see happening in the community?

MOAKLEY: Well, the veterans' groups were not all together. Some of them had some different feelings. But, you know, you couldn't just take how the veterans are feeling on the war, because this didn't just affect veterans, it affected everybody. So it's not like some other issues that really directly affect veterans. I mean, this is a fact, that mothers and fathers and kids who are waiting on that draft list to go overseas.

McETTRICK: So did you get a lot of constituent reaction, finally, on the war? Did you get letters and phone calls?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah. I got a lot of—but I had made up my mind that we'd been there long enough. Had I gotten elected two years sooner, I might have been just the other way, but in that two years, there was just a turn in the war.

McETTRICK: So you could bring a somewhat different perspective to it, that things are starting to change?

MOAKLEY: That's right, yeah, and as a veteran, you know, when you speak—I mean, if you're a non-veteran and you say, "Hey, let's get out of there." They're [saying], Oh, what do you know? You know, but if you're a veteran, they give you a little leeway, and I was given that leeway.

McETTRICK: So the Personnel Committee, and then where did you go from there in terms of—

MOAKLEY: The Rules Committee. See, the Personnel Committee handled all the patronage jobs down there. So every member of Congress who had to put someone to work down there

had to come to Joe Moakley, and I'd get to know a lot of people very quick. In fact, we had more kids with a Boston accent on the police department down there than anywhere else.

O'Neill used to kid me, he said, "Geez, I thought I was back in Brattle Square with all these Boston accents down there." But it gave me a great opportunity to show people who I was, and then on the Rules Committee, of course every bill has to go to the Rules Committee. It's a Speaker's committee and from—so many chairmen of the committee want to make sure that members of the Rules Committee are happy with their presentation of their bill, otherwise it doesn't get out. Because if the Rules Committee says no, the bill just doesn't go to the floor. So I made a lot of friends in that committee.

ALLISON: One of the big issues during your first term was the impeachment of President Nixon?²⁴

MOAKLEY: Yeah. Yeah. As a matter of fact, I remember sitting—I used to spend a lot of time with Tip then. I remember sitting with Jimmy Breslin²⁵ and talking about what's going on, and Jimmy Breslin would be like sitting in a corner with his eyes closed, and the next you'd pick up the column written by him word for word for word. Great, great mind. In fact, he just called me a couple of weeks ago. But I remember O'Neill sending for Peter Rodino,²⁶ and Tip, at the time, felt that the Judiciary Committee wasn't moving quick enough.

And, of course, everybody knew that Nixon was capable of many things, so people thought maybe he may have had something. O'Neill, calling on Rodino, he said, "Pete, how's the investigation going?" "Well, okay." He says, "Does Nixon have anything on you?" He said, "What do you mean?" "Just what I said. So anything that you're afraid is going to come out if you go ahead with it." He said, "No, not a thing, Mr. Speaker, honest to God." He said, "Well get off your ass and get going." I mean—and he was the one who prodded him, because nobody

²⁴ Impeachment proceedings for President Richard Nixon (1913-1994) began in May of 1974; Nixon resigned the presidency in August of 1974 before the proceedings were complete.

²⁵ Jimmy Breslin (1929-) is an American columnist and author.

²⁶ Peter Rodino (1909-2005), a Democrat, represented New Jersey's Tenth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1949 to 1989. He was chairman of the House Judiciary Committee from 1973 to 1989 and also of the impeachment hearings for President Nixon.

likes to impeach a president. I mean in those days, you know—and so the thing just started going down. But it was Tip O’Neill who—he wasn’t the Speaker at the time, I think he was the Majority Leader—it was his prodding that moved that investigation forward.

McETTRICK: What do you think it was that did it, that really was the catalyst that made that whole impeachment action in the committee? It seemed to be going on for a while, and then all of a sudden—

MOAKLEY: Well, I think that that was one of them, and I think that O’Neill spoke to other people and said, “Look it. I don’t care what the results are; get moving on this thing. We want something happening. We don’t want this thing to die on the vine.” And I think that people started making moves.

McETTRICK: Now how much contact had you had with the president? I suppose for a congressman it’s a rare opportunity, especially if you’re in the other party.

MOAKLEY: Well I didn’t have any contact with Nixon, because I didn’t like Nixon. I just didn’t like the things that I read about, what I saw him doing. In fact, that was the first year I was invited to the president’s Christmas Ball, and I didn’t go. I felt nothing for Nixon. I just thought he was just too tough on this thing and too unforgiving. Very paranoid, too.

Tip used to say, “You know, you can tell a lot about a guy if you play poker with him.” He says, “Nixon and Carter were probably the two brightest presidents we ever had. I mean, if you talk with them on issues, they could go right down to sub-section and they knew everything.” He said, “But they’re not my types of people.” And he says, “I didn’t like Carter and I didn’t like Nixon.” “Nixon, I played poker with,” he said, “and he just didn’t handle himself properly. He’d get awful upset when he loses and throw the cards down, you know?”

ALLISON: What about Gerald Ford,²⁷ who was a member of Congress when you were—

MOAKLEY: Yeah. I didn't know Gerald. That was when I was brand new. I didn't know Gerald, but Gerald Ford and Tip were very, very friendly. They'd have very partisan debates on the floor of the House. There'd be blood all over the place, but when the bell rang, it was all over. That night they'd be out drinking. That weekend, they and their wives would be out golfing somewhere, not like today where the message and the messenger gets so confused that the incivility just runs rampant up there. But I liked Ford, and Tip liked Ford, too.

McETTRICK: Did you like living in Washington? Where did you stay when you were down there during the session? Did you move around over the years?

MOAKLEY: No. I bought a place down there, and even though I didn't spend many weekends there, I figured I'd better buy down there, because the rents were just so prohibitive. And we don't have—we're only given three thousand a year in expenses. It's Congress. I mean, we're not treated like salesmen or anything else. We get killed on that thing, so I figured I'd buy something down there. In '77 I bought a place; I still have it.

ALLISON: So you have two houses; one there?

MOAKLEY: Yeah.

ALLISON: And would Evelyn²⁸ go down to that one?

MOAKLEY: She'd go down. Sometimes she'd stay down, and sometimes she'd stay up here. We kind of split it up.

McETTRICK: When did you first meet Evelyn?

²⁷ Gerald Ford (1913-2006), a Republican, represented Michigan's Fifth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1949 to 1973, when he was nominated vice president after the resignation of Spiro Agnew. He became president in 1974 after Richard Nixon's resignation and served as president until 1977.

²⁸ Evelyn (Duffy) Moakley (1927-1996) was Congressman Moakley's wife. They married in 1957.

MOAKLEY: I first met Evelyn in 1950. It was my first state rep's fight, and I went to a party in Cambridge, and she came from Cambridge. A bunch of us men from South Boston, and there were a couple of tables—it was a club, but there were different functions going on in the club. So one of the fellows in my group got up and went over to ask her to dance, and Evelyn was taller than this fellow, so she just felt uncomfortable. So she said no. So I figured I'd show him up, so I went over and asked her to dance, and she danced, and here we are.

McETTRICK: Was she politically inclined?

MOAKLEY: Oh, no.

McETTRICK: Could she tolerate politics?

MOAKLEY: She didn't like politics at all; that was one of the big arguments we used to have, because, you know, I'd be away all week, and then I'd come back, and I'd have to go to banquets Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday. You know, "What about me?" Politics is a jealous mistress, too. I mean, it really takes the man out of the house or the candidate out of the house. You know, you have to have a strong marriage to stay together. I've seen many of them break up just because they're just apart so much.

McETTRICK: So when did you finally get married? Was it pretty soon or did it take a while?

MOAKLEY: Oh, it took a while, because—well, I wanted to graduate from law school. I wanted to pass the bar, and I did. So in 1957 I passed the bar, graduated from law—became Majority Whip, and then we got married.

ALLISON: She was willing to wait for you all those years?

MOAKLEY: No. (laughter)

McETTRICK: You have to tell us about Suffolk University Law School. Did you go at night?

MOAKLEY: Oh, I sure did.

McETTRICK: Why don't you tell us a little bit about—what was that like?

MOAKLEY: Oh, it was great. I went to law school nights. I'd just leave the state house right across the street, go out the back door and in that class we had about five to six state reps. Jimmy Linnehan²⁹ of course was a CPA at the time, and Jeanne Hession,³⁰ and we kind of bonded. We'd go to school and then we'd go out and have a drink or something afterwards, and we all had our own different life. We all had daytime jobs, but they say that class of '56 was probably tighter than most classes for some reason.

But Jeanne Hession had a great knack of taking notes, and so she used to supply her notes, and I think her notes probably got half the class through law school. So we felt we should do something because she was so good, so we campaigned and made her the first female president of the law school—the law school class. And we remain friends till today.

McETTRICK: So you were in the older building, the Archer Building?³¹

MOAKLEY: Yes.

McETTRICK: They hadn't even built the Donahue Building³² at that time?

MOAKLEY: No.

²⁹ James F. Linnehan, Sr., was a classmate and close friend of Moakley's and is a member of Suffolk University's board of trustees. OH-065 in the John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project is an interview with Mr. Linnehan.

³⁰ Jeanne Hession was a classmate and close friend of Moakley's and is a member of Suffolk University's board of trustees. OH-015 in the John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project is an interview with Ms. Hession.

³¹ Suffolk University's Gleason L. and Hiram J. Archer Building, named after the university's founder and his brother, is located at 20 Derne Street in Boston, across from the back entrance to the Massachusetts State House.

³² Suffolk University's Frank J. Donahue Building, named after a judge and former faculty member, trustee, and treasurer of Suffolk University, is located at 41 Temple Street in Boston, down the street from the Archer Building.

McETTRICK: So things were pretty crowded. They must have had a lot of GIs who had come back?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

McETTRICK: The place must have been bursting.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah. This was a veterans' class, because, you know, the law, and we started—I think we started about '52 or '53. Yeah.

McETTRICK: Anyone that you recall from that era, particularly in terms of the faculty or other people that you encountered at the school?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. I remember Dean O'Brien.³³

McETTRICK: John F. X.?

MOAKLEY: John F.X. was a professor, and then there was a great law—a criminal professor, who had a great sense of humor. I forget his name. Then we had a fellow named Williams,³⁴ who was a contracts lawyer and a great, great teacher. And then there was a young fellow a couple of years ahead of us, that I knew was going to go someplace; his name was Dave Sargent.³⁵ (laughter) But they were nice people. I think when you go nights, you know, everybody is in the same—I mean, we went with people who had been from Worcester, and newspaper writers, and I mean everybody. The class was so mixed up.

McETTRICK: So did you have much chance to study, you know, with your whole day in the House? You must have been really pressed for time.

³³ John F. X. O'Brien was a member of Suffolk's law school faculty from 1948 to 1976 and served as dean of the law school from 1952 to 1956.

³⁴ Kenneth Williams (1902-1980) was a graduate of Suffolk Law School (JD '27) and member of the law school faculty from 1928 to 1958.

³⁵ David J. Sargent graduated from Suffolk Law School in 1954, then served as a law faculty member from 1956 to 1973, dean of the law school from 1973 to 1989, and has been president of Suffolk University since 1989.

MOAKLEY: No. Yeah, we studied as much as we could, but, you know, it probably wouldn't come up to academic standards today.

McETTRICK: So you kind of sit in the back a little bit and hope you didn't get called on?

MOAKLEY: Oh, absolutely. (laughter) "Please, don't call on me."

McETTRICK: I saw on your diploma that it was signed by John F.X. O'Brien. What was the graduation—what was that like? You probably barely recall that.

MOAKLEY: I don't. I don't.

McETTRICK: It was just one of many things happening to you at that point?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, there were so many things jammed into my life at one time that I forgot where the graduation was now.

McETTRICK: And then you sat for the bar exam.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

McETTRICK: Were you relieved to finally get through that experience?

MOAKLEY: Oh, absolutely. I had to take it twice. That bothered me that I had to take it twice, but then I figured well, going nights and missing so many classes, what the hell; I was lucky to get it that time. But it was—the greatest feeling is when someone says, "You've passed the bar."

McETTRICK: Relief.

ALLISON: Did you ever practice law?

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah. I practiced from '57 to '70. I practiced out of my own office, and being in public office, it was just so natural and people were coming to me, because they thought I was a lawyer for twenty years, anyway.

ALLISON: I know some people in South Boston who run for office just to publicize their law practice.

MOAKLEY: Oh, sure. In those days, that was the only way you could advertise. Now you can advertise any way.

McETTRICK: So you started to talk about your reflections on the various presidents; I guess we should ask you a little bit about that. You told us a lot about Nixon and then Gerry Ford went in there. It was a tough time.

MOAKLEY: Yeah.

McETTRICK: How did you think he did under the circumstances?

MOAKLEY: I think he did what he had to do. Even though I didn't like Nixon at all, I think he had to pardon Nixon. He couldn't keep that thing going. It was like an open sore. And that cost him the election. I got along with Carter okay, but Carter just brought the Georgia mentality up, and he thought that the same guys that were so successful around him in Georgia would be—do the same job in D.C., and of course they didn't do it. And then when he locked himself into the White House in that cardigan sweater during the hostage trial, all he did every day was just remind people of how impotent we were in that situation. A terrible thing.

I liked George Bush, senior, Tip liked him very much, and I thought he was a nice guy. Of course, you have to separate them personality and politically. Of course, there were many political things I didn't care for, but you just can't judge a person by his politics every time you

see him. Like when I had—when GW [George Walker Bush] signed the bill in the Rose Garden for naming the courthouse after me,³⁶ I had him for about ten minutes in the oval room, and I was just kidding with him a little bit, and he’s got a great sense of humor. You know, I thought he might be stiff and all. Off camera and, you know, head-to-head, he’s a pretty funny guy.

McETRICK: How about Ronald Reagan? Did you have much contact with him?

MOAKLEY: Well, yeah, Ronald Reagan used to credit himself as being an Irish storyteller. I remember one time I had a bill on the floor and Speaker O’Neill was in the chair, so after I finished speaking, he beckons me down to the podium. I says, “How you doing?” He says, “Good.” He says, “I just left Reagan.” He says, “You know, every Wednesday we meet. We talk about the world affairs. We talk about the legislative programs. We talk about everything.” He says, “But before we start, we always start with some kind of an Irish story or joke or something. The president says, “Tip, I got a great one for you.” He starts telling the story. Tip says, “I put my hand on his hand, and I said, ‘Mr. President, Joe Moakley’s been telling that for thirty years.’” (laughter)

Now here’s how the story goes, so you could tell by the content: It was the end of World War II, Hitler knows he’s losing the war, and he calls his top spy to his side. He says, “Look it, we got a spy over in Dublin, Ireland. His name is Murphy. He’s got some information on the English.” He says, “I think if we get that information, we implement it, we can stop all combat on that side.” He said, “But this Murphy is a top spy.” He says, “In order to get to him, you have to give him the password, and it’s got to be exact or he won’t answer.” He says, “The password is the grass is green, the moon is high, and the cows are ready for milking.” The guy says, “I got it.”

One dark night he parachutes—he flies over Dublin, parachutes in and lands in a field, buries his parachute, and he’s walking through the field and he comes upon the farmer. The farmer says, “Can I help you?” He says, “Yeah.” He says, “I’m looking for Murphy.” He says, “You’re

³⁶ On March 13, 2001, President George W. Bush signed Public Law No. 107-2 naming the U.S. courthouse on South Boston’s Fan Pier the John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse.

looking for Murphy?” He says, “You’re in Dublin. We’ve got Murphy the plumber, Murphy the undertaker, Murphy the sail maker and Murphy the butcher, Murphy the baker. In fact, I’m Murphy the farmer.” He says, “You’re Murphy the farmer?” He says, “Yeah.” He shakes him by the ear. He looks in his eyes. He says, “The grass is green, the moon is high, and the cows are ready for milking.” He says, “You want Murphy the spy. He lives over the delicatessen downtown.” (laughter) So that’s the story.

McETTRICK: Did you ever have a chance to go over to Ireland yourself?

MOAKLEY: Oh, sure. I went with Tip a couple of times.

McETTRICK: Did you really?

MOAKLEY: We went up to visit his home where his great aunt was born. We met with John Hume,³⁷ met with Ian Paisley.³⁸ In fact, I remember when we were going from Ireland up to Northern Ireland, and I remember when we were landing, we were in helicopters and the constabulary there had these dogs with their big white teeth gnashing and there’s all kind of warlike souvenirs all over the place.

So the head security guy says, “Mr. Speaker, you and Mrs. O’Neill will come with me in this bulletproof car. It’s got seven-eighths high end on the bottom bulletproof.” He says, “Congressman Moakley, you come with me in the lead car.” I says, “Now I know how those pigs felt running over those mine fields in Russia.” (laughter) But it was quite a trip. We really met some funny people and talked to a lot of very bright people up there.

McETTRICK: So how do you think they’re going to make out over there?

MOAKLEY: Well I hope—I hope—in fact, I talked to John Hume a couple of weeks ago—that they can get back together again. It’s a shame to come this far and then blow it. It’s small

³⁷ John Hume (1937-) is a former politician in Northern Ireland and founding member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

³⁸ Ian Paisley (1926-) was the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland from 1971 to 2008.

things, but, you know, you've got to forget something, if you're going to go forward. It's like having a fight with your wife on the honeymoon; if you're going to start every argument with that fight on the honeymoon, nothing's ever going to get solved.

McETTRICK: Can you tell us about Tip O'Neill's becoming the Speaker? How did that all come about?

MOAKLEY: Well Tip—it was a very strange way. Tip O'Neill was Majority Leader. No. No. He wasn't. I'm sorry. Carl Albert was Speaker. Lindy Boggs³⁹ [sic-Hale Boggs] was Majority Leader, and now they had to pick—at that time they picked the Speaker—the Whip, I'm sorry. So Lindy Boggs went into Carl Albert. He says, “All right. I got the selection for Whip.” He says, “Who is it?” He says, “Danny Rostenkowski.”⁴⁰ Carl Albert says, “No way, Danny Rostenkowski. The way he embarrassed me at that Chicago convention when Daley said, ‘Go up and take that gavel away,’ and he took that gavel away, there's no way he's going to get it.”⁴¹ He said, “Well, gee,” he says, “That's my”—“I don't care what your choice is. Go out and get somebody else.”

So then he went and he looked and it was between Boland⁴² and O'Neill, and Boland got it. But if Danny Rostenkowski hadn't taken that gavel away, O'Neill never would have been heard from. That's the way this thing happened. So O'Neill gets the Whip's job. Then there was Nick

³⁹ Corinne Claiborne “Lindy” Boggs (1916-), a Democrat, represented Louisiana's Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 1991. She succeeded her husband, Hale Boggs (1914-1972), in Congress after he was presumed dead in a plane disappearance over Alaska in 1972. Hale Boggs, not Lindy, was House Majority Leader beginning in 1971, a role that he held at the time of his presumed death. Hale had been in Congress since 1941.

⁴⁰ Daniel Rostenkowski (1928-), a Democrat, represented Illinois' Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959 to 1993 and the Fifth Congressional District from 1993 to 1995.

⁴¹ Carl Albert was chair of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, during which proceedings became raucous due to the turbulent political atmosphere, combined with the fact that House Speaker Albert was suffering from laryngitis and hearing problems due to a cold. President Lyndon Johnson, watching the disorder on television, called Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and asked him to restore order. Mayor Daley asked Dan Rostenkowski to reclaim order, which he did by taking away Albert's gavel. There are conflicting stories as to whether Rostenkowski asked Albert for the gavel or physically grabbed it from him.

⁴² Edward P. Boland (1911-2001), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Second Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1989.

Begich,⁴³ who was the congressman from Alaska, and he had Hale Boggs take a ride up on some kind of a campaign trip and the plane went down. So now O'Neill goes from Whip to Majority Leader.

Then Carl Albert was a little guy, but he just didn't seem comfortable as the Speaker. He just lasted a couple of terms, and he got out. O'Neill became the Speaker. So it was from almost nowhere to Speaker, you know, in a very short period of time, but he was a great Speaker, and I think he was the Speaker for about ten years. And he handled the job very well.

ALLISON: Now you were at the 1968 convention? Do you have any—

MOAKLEY: I sure was. Oh! All I can remember is the stink bombs and the smelly urine and the broken windows on the stores and the crowds in the street throwing barrels through them. It was like being at Checkpoint Charlie.⁴⁴ Every bus going to the convention had a police car behind it and a police car in front of it. Every bridge there were police with rifles on the bridge. It was a scary, scary thing. And it was a terrible situation, but—

McETTRICK: It was for the good of the country when Johnson announced that he wouldn't run for reelection. We had a couple of assassinations?

MOAKLEY: Yup.

McETTRICK: How about Bobby Kennedy? Did you ever have any contact with him? Because he was really one of the main players there in '68.

MOAKLEY: Yeah. I met him. I wasn't close. As I said, in '68, I wasn't even in the Congress. I was a state senator. So it was just kind of a different relationship. You know, people in public

⁴³ Nicholas Begich (1932-1972) represented Alaska's At-Large District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1971 until his presumed death, along with Congressman Hale Boggs of Louisiana, in a plane crash over Alaska in 1972.

⁴⁴ Checkpoint Charlie was the name given by the Western Allies during the Cold War to an area in Germany where East Berlin and West Berlin met in the neighborhood of Friedrichstadt.

office didn't join—if they're on the same level, they can get together a lot easier than people on lower levels.

ALLISON: Who were you supporting in '68?

MOAKLEY: McGovern. Yeah. Was it McGovern in '68?

ALLISON: Well he came in after Bobby Kennedy's assassination. Was it McCarthy or Humphrey?

MOAKLEY: Must have been Humphrey.⁴⁵ But I was with McGovern when he ran the presidential primary up here.⁴⁶

McETRICK: Yeah, that was '72.

MOAKLEY: It was '72. Yeah.

(interruption)

ALLISON: And what effect did this have on the party in Massachusetts or in the country?

MOAKLEY: Well, in '72 McGovern took Massachusetts by storm, and I happened to be with McGovern, because I was, you know, not taking the orthodox route to the Congress. I was running as an Independent, and I can remember talking to some of the senators. And they said, "Have you lost your mind? He hasn't got a chance." Then the day after election, they're all out, and I'm in, you know?

⁴⁵ Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978), a Democrat, represented Minnesota in the U.S. Senate from 1949 to 1964 and from 1971 to 1978. He served as vice president under Lyndon B. Johnson from 1965 to 1969. He was the Democratic presidential nominee in the 1968 election, but lost to Richard Nixon.

⁴⁶ George McGovern (1922-), a Democrat, represented South Dakota's First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1957 to 1961, and then represented South Dakota in the U.S. Senate from 1963 to 1981. He was the Democratic presidential in the 1972 election, but lost to incumbent Richard Nixon.

But he was very exciting. A lot of people think he was just a peacenik, but he was a bomber in World War II. He had earned his stripes, but that was a very different type. I remember we started with Lindsay⁴⁷ and then Lindsay gave up, and then McGovern—and it did change, and I guess the only state McGovern took was Massachusetts.

McETTRICK: You know there's so many things to really ask you about. One topic that we put on our list was, if you could just tell us about the Big Dig;⁴⁸ your involvement with that. There are so many federal projects that you've had a hand in, in Massachusetts, and it all has to go through those funnel points in Congress, but the saga with the Big Dig I think, is something that people will be talking about for years, both in its origins and now in its completion. What can you tell us about that?

MOAKLEY: Well, remember, in the eighties when Fred Salvucci⁴⁹ came down and talked to O'Neill and myself about the Big Dig, and he says, "This is great. It's only going to cost 2.9 billion dollars." So we weren't too happy with that; that was like a lot of money; and then as it escalated, the problem was, it wasn't—it was that nobody had the ability to predict the cost at that stage of the program. It hadn't even started.

And here you are in the year 2000—well that year was 1980—you're talking about going under a city that was established in 1630 and all the problems that that presented, but we worked back and forth. In fact, the Third Harbor Tunnel⁵⁰ was involved in that thing and Tip and I were not too crazy about the Third Harbor Tunnel, because Tip felt that his people in East Boston would be dispossessed and I felt my people in South Boston would be removed. But he said, "No. No. They won't." So he said, "Just give me a chance, and if at any stage of the game, before the bill

⁴⁷ John V. Lindsay (1921-2000), originally a Republican, represented New York's Seventeenth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959 to 1965, then served as mayor of New York City from 1966 to 1973. He changed his political party to Democrat in order to run in the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination, but lost to George McGovern.

⁴⁸ The Big Dig, or Central Artery/Tunnel Project (CA/T), was the largest public works project in U.S. history and involved the replacement of downtown Boston's elevated highway with a tunnel. The project began in 1991 and ended in 2007.

⁴⁹ Frederick P. Salvucci served as secretary of transportation for Massachusetts under Governor Michael Dukakis from 1975 to 1978 and 1983 to 1990.

⁵⁰ The Third Harbor Tunnel project, part of the Big Dig, involved the construction of a tunnel connecting South Boston to Logan Airport in East Boston. It was completed in 1995 and named the Ted Williams Tunnel.

takes effect, either one of you say, 'Stop', that's the end of the Third Harbor Tunnel." So we were bartering on that, bartering on the Big Dig.

END OF PART 1

MOAKLEY: As the project progressed, of course it went up because all these new innovative types that they had to take. My greatest wish that--when they were investigating it, that if the overruns were overruns because of the inability to, you know, look forward at that time, rather than fraud. There was no fraud, no criminality. And that's what I was happy about. But at the end when the cost overrun is going on, I'm dean of the delegation and I'm being called on by some of the people down there, "Hey, you said it was going to cost this." I said, "Look, I was just talking what they told me." But I think it's near completion and it's probably three or four years away. The federal government put a total of 8.5 billion dollars into it, and that's the cap; that's all they're going to put into it. So any more money has to go into it has got to be state money.

McETTRICK: Well, it has certainly created a lot of jobs. The environment has changed almost completely as a result—

MOAKLEY: The city of Boston needed something like that because it's so small and so clustered and so many streets intersect. I don't know if you do, but I remember before we had a Southeast Expressway. I mean, you almost had to stop at every corner in Boston to get through. So it is going to be great. In Boston, you can only really appreciate the greatness of Boston when you go outside of Boston. We've got a great city. I know people that have their kids at school here, just dying to come up and visit their kids so they can eat in one of the restaurants up here and do whatever else they can do up here. But we do have a great city and the Big Dig is going to make it that much better.

McETTRICK: One of the changes seems to be the waterfront, really, right from East Boston over to South Boston. How much has the waterfront changed as you think about it, when you were growing up? What was it like, and what's happened?

MOAKLEY: When I was a kid, I can remember thousands of clam diggers, digging clams at Carson Beach, and then the pollution came and stopped the clam digging, and then the algae and everything else. In fact, one time, if somebody said, “Where is the harbor?” You’d—(sniffs)—you’d direct them by smell. I mean it was a smelly place, and then a few years ago, when Bush called it the dirtiest harbor—and Ted Kennedy and I decided we were going to do something about it.

Through the MWRA [Massachusetts Water Resource Authority], we got almost a billion dollars outside of the MWRA to clean up the harbor. We’ve got a clean harbor today, and because it’s clean, the fish are back, the dolphin, the phytoplankton. The beaches are open, the water—the MWRA, the water is almost 80 percent pure when they put it into that pipe and spew it out, nine miles out.

And now those islands will come into being since the harbor has been cleaned up and in fact, this is one of the places that you’ll take off to go out to the islands, some of those rafts out here. We’re going to have a visitor center in the lobby of this courthouse. So it’s changed completely, and I—some of the tourist people tell me that one of the attractions that bring people to Boston are the harbor islands, the proximity to the harbor islands, and I just can see them being part of an educational program in high school. I know that a couple of years ago we put a triumvirate together with the city, state, and federal government to make these islands be under the control of the three. And we’ve got some money for it, and we’re going to still continue to do it. So I think that we live in a great city. We live in a city that’s got these islands that very few—nobody else has got. And I just think we will be so modern, so ahead of everybody else when we finish the Big Dig, that this will be the place to visit.

McETTRICK: How did all this change affect South Boston? You mentioned that when you were younger a lot of dads were longshoremen, you know, worked in factories or whatever, and I guess the port really slowed down. What was the effect in South Boston? How was that? How did that change the community?

MOAKLEY: Well, this area down here there's been a thousand acres of land that's been used for low-grade commercial uses and really not used for its best potential. Twenty-five years ago, I tried to get mass transit down here. And I made the best case I could, and they said, "Look, we're not going to send mass transit down there to take care of two restaurants and a couple of office buildings."

So I knew I needed a very weighty project. So when this courthouse came on the scene, I was the only guy in America, if you may recall in the newspapers, that wanted it here. I was accused of all kinds of terrible things to get this project here, but what I said then, and it's recorded in the newspaper, I said, "You get that courthouse down on the Fan Pier, and we will get mass transit down here the following year." I said, "And you will be able to develop a thousand acres of land that are only used for low-grade commercial uses. This will be the hottest part of the city of Boston."

I said, "This will be a great source of revenue with the hotels and with the condominiums," and that's happened. But there's also a payback, because everybody wants to move down here, and some of these condos are going to go for a million dollars apiece, and there aren't too many people that can afford that. Everybody wants to move as close to the waterfront as they can, so that's why the prices in South Boston and the North End are going sky high, because that's where people are going to locate. And that's—the bad side of it is some of the people that currently live in those areas will not be able to stay in those areas, because it's just going to be priced out of the market. That's why when they talked about some of these Betterment Trusts⁵¹ and other things to take care of the people who live there, I thought the idea was great.

ALLISON: Do you see any other solution for the problem?

MOAKLEY: Well, affordable housing—how do you get there, you know? It's a phrase overused, but under-worked. But you've got to take care of Mrs. O'Leary and the three

⁵¹ The South Boston Betterment Trust was formed in 1998 to provide funding, through donations by developers, for affordable housing in the neighborhood.

daughters that live in South Boston. You can't throw them out because somebody can pay twice or three times the rent that they can pay.

McETTRICK: There's been a lot of talk lately about Social Security reform and the budget and you hear this periodically, but I can remember hearing the story that back in the Ronald Reagan era that there was an assault, if you will, on Social Security, and Tip O'Neill played a major role in the policy—

MOAKLEY: That's right.

McETTRICK: Can you tell us a bit about what that was all like?

MOAKLEY: Well, Tip O'Neill grew up in the depression and every once in a while when he and I would get together and just want to get a little melancholy, he'd throw his feet up on the desk and light up a cigar; he'd talk about the people, the old people going over the hill to the poorhouse. How terrible it was, and he said, "Social Security is the only way we're going to keep them from not going there," and so he was a staunch defender of Social Security. And, you know, he—in fact today the fight is still O'Neill's fight. What to do with the surplus.

The Democrats want to put it into Social Security and Medicare and prescription drugs in the Medicare, and then whatever we have left over, just give a tax break; but some of the Republicans, their bill is they give the big tax break, and then they're going to put the budget together and figure out how much they need—that's not really the way to do it.

And once you do that, if you are short, you're not going to take the tax breaks away you're going to take some discretionary fund money away. So Tip was right then and he did fight Reagan. In fact he used to say—he'd say, you know, "Look, were a couple of Irishman, but he kind of left us behind I think."

McETTRICK: Of course, that was a Democratic Congress.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

McETTRICK: And that really had Democratic control.

MOAKLEY: That's right. Yeah.

McETTRICK: Now there really isn't!

MOAKLEY: There's no—it's all Republican. Republican House, Republican Congress, Republican president.

McETTRICK: Yeah.

MOAKLEY: But I still think that we're going to win on that fight. Because I think the people are just paying too close attention to it. I mean President Bush was able to get his tax bill through the house, but he's not going to get it through the senate that quickly and I think there's going to be a lot of negotiation, a lot of changing.

McETTRICK: The mission that's sounding now is, you know, clean elections and election campaign finance reform, and one thing that we learned was that you haven't really used television, for the most part, to run for Congress.

MOAKLEY: With this face, would you? (laughter) Actually, I grew up in the pre-television era. In fact, I didn't even have a press agent or whatever they call them, until I went to Congress, and I just got them to be defensive. So when newspapers call me, then he can talk to them. And they say that a press release from Joe Moakley is a very rare item, which is so.

It's—I don't know. It's changed. A lot of people write a nice press release, file a bill, speak on it about a week, and then forget and do something else. Some of the causes that I've been involved in—hey, it's fire-safe cigarettes; it started in 1975 or six, and I'm still fighting it and—but I was fighting it when the tobacco industries were eight hundred-pound gorillas. Now that

they're softening up, it looks like my bill will get through. I passed about three or four pieces of it, but I could never get the final piece of it. But the secret of this business is you've got to stay with it. But there are so many things that pass your scope that it's very hard to keep focused, and we try and sometimes we're successful.

McETTRICK: Do you think the democracy is in trouble, because of the cost of campaigning?

MOAKLEY: No. I don't think it's in trouble.

McETTRICK: Do you think we're going to be okay?

MOAKLEY: I don't think we're in trouble. The worst thing that I have to do, and I never get used to it, is asking for money in campaigns. I wish there was some other way. I wish they could either limit it, the size of the campaign, the timing of the campaign; but the money, you know, it costs so much to run. I mean the rates for politicians in radio and TV are higher than other rates. And, you know, some people can use TV. Some people can't.

I mean this is a very expensive TV market up here. I've used radio, because I could saturate a radio, but I couldn't afford to saturate TV. No. I think the Feingold-McCain⁵² is starting to move, and I think something will be done. I don't know if it will get exactly the whole piece, but I would like to see some real restriction. The soft money is what kills you, where people can spend a million dollars on an ad, and kick the hell out of you, and never have to report to anybody, as long as they don't mention the other candidate. They can say, "Vote against Joe Moakley, because he did this, da da da. He voted against this. He did"—and that's the end of the ad, and nobody knows who put it up there. It's soft money. And that's what they've done, they've abused the soft money situation.

⁵² The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, or McCain-Feingold Act, enacted in 2002, is a United States federal law that amended the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, which regulates the financing of political campaigns.

ALLISON: Well, we were talking about some other personalities, people you had known and other—some public figures in Boston and Massachusetts politics, some current and some not, and I wondered if you'd tell us something about some of these people?

MOAKLEY: Well, you know, despite my public persona, I'm really not—I'm kind of a solo-type guy. Tip and I were very close, and that was it. I mean other members, hey I work with them. I have a lot of fun and everything else, but the bell rings, "See you later." I go home.

So I don't get into a lot of the party stuff or the embassy stuff, because it just never did anything for me. I was voted the most popular congressman in the Congress I think three years in a row, and I think I've only had meals with probably a half a dozen congressmen. I work with them, and we work well, but, you know, when that bell rings it's, "See you later."

McETRICK: One issue that we wanted to ask you about was your involvement with El Salvador and the investigation, the Jesuit priests. How did you get involved in that issue to begin with?

MOAKLEY: Well, you know, of all the issues that I've been involved with; I mean it was probably when I got involved with it, it was a no-win issue, because—I know when I first got involved with it, I was getting calls from my constituents, "Hey, what are you doing down there with them, if you want to bring people in this country, what about the Irish and the Italian?" You know, I'd get—that wasn't a win.

What happened is I have post office meetings and town hall meetings and—where I send a card, "Anybody got any problems, come in." So in Jamaica Plain this group of people come in one day, and they started talking about El Salvador, talking about the killings and the death squads and how at that time fifty thousand noncombatants were killed. And this is a country the size of Massachusetts, a population the size of Massachusetts.

Well, I hadn't heard those things before, so I got Jim McGovern, who is now the congressman from Worcester, but he was my lead guy at the time. I said, "Would you check this thing out?"

So he checked it out, and he said, “That’s right.” He says, “These people from El Salvador are just getting killed, because of the military down there is so tough and if you’re on the street in the wrong time, your throat is slit. If you’re out organizing coffee pickers, you know, you’re killed.” So I tried to change the law.⁵³ I wrote to Meese,⁵⁴ and it was under Reagan’s administration, to change the immigration law, so that it allowed the El Salvadorans who were in this country to stay under a limited extended volunteer departure and give them green cards so they could work over here.

Well they wouldn’t hear of it. So then I passed legislation, and we got to conference. Meese called up Rodino, who was the chairman; he said, “Look it, if Moakley’s amendment goes through, the whole bill is dead.” So Rodino said, “Joe, what am I going to do. There’s a lot of good stuff in here for the Irish, the Italians and so on and so on, and even some Hispanic.” I said, “Okay. I’m not going to kill the bill, but I want to be sure that I’m the first one out of the box the next time this immigration comes up.” And Alan Simpson⁵⁵ was there, and I says, “Alan I don’t want you giving me any parliamentary roller coaster rides over at the Senate when it gets there.” He said, “Okay.”

So anyway, a couple of years later, we get it there. We’re in the same spot, and there were about hundred-fifty people in the room. The theater was great. The senators were on one side; the house members on the other side. So Jack Brooks⁵⁶ was in charge of the House members and Alan Simpson was in charge of the Senate members. So the bill comes up, and then they’re trying to work it out, so they go through amendment by amendment. So every rep would get up and say, well, “Senator, I’ve got a bill.” “No. We’re not going to break. Take it in.” So they kept this, “Nope. Nope.”

⁵³ Starting in 1983, Congressman Moakley introduced legislation to protect Salvadorans in the U.S. using the “Extended Voluntary Departure” provision that allowed a temporary stay of deportation and work authorization. Moakley was finally able to pass legislation that granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Salvadorans in the Immigration Act of 1990 (PL. 101-649). TPS grants temporary legal residency and work authorization to immigrants fleeing civil wars, natural disasters or other conditions in their home country for a set period of time. In El Salvador’s case, TPS has been extended several times since 1990. The TPS designation has been used by other countries experiencing civil unrest and is administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). (See <http://www.uscis.gov>.)

⁵⁴ Edwin Meese III (1931-), a Republican, served as Attorney General of the United States from 1985 to 1988.

⁵⁵ Alan K. Simpson (1931-), a Republican, represented Wyoming in the U.S. Senate from 1979 to 1997.

⁵⁶ Jack Brooks (1922-), a Democrat, represented Texas’ Second Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1965 and its Ninth District from 1965 to 1995.

So he comes to mine. He says, “No. We’re not going to do it.” I said, “Well if you’re not going to do it, you’re not going to have a bill.” He says, “You wouldn’t do that; would you?” He says, “A lot of good stuff in here for the Irish.” I says, “Yeah. I know it, but there’s no stuff in here for the El Salvadorans.” He says, “You’d jeopardize the bill?” I says, “You bet your ass.” I says, “I’ve been here two years before. This is the last time.” Let me tell you, “It has to come back to my committee and the Rules Committee before he gets final approval. It’s not going to get final approval unless this amendment is in there.” Well they recessed. They got on the phone with the president back and forth; finally—I was looking for a thirty six month extended volunteer departure. They come back with eighteen months. So I said, “Okay.” So we worked it out, and what it meant is that the half a million El Salvadorans who were in this country could stay there.

Up until then, they were—the immigration would just throw them right back, and as soon as they got back, they’d be incarcerated or tortured, or something else. So that was that part of it. A couple of years later these Jesuit priests, six Jesuit priests the housekeeper and her daughter were killed.⁵⁷ There was a lot of press over who did it, whether it was the military, whether it was the FMLN [Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional or Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front], which was the rebel group, and back and forth; and Bush was making a statement that the rebels did it. And someone else, so finally we were—got from some of the people we dealt with, we got some information that the rebels didn’t do it, it was the military.

So Tom Foley⁵⁸ called me. I was down in Florida, giving a speech to the laborer’s union or something. He said, “Joe,” he says, “I don’t like the way that investigation is going down there.” He said, “I want you to handle it.” I said, “What do you mean handle it?” He said, “I want you to be chairman of the committee and task force.” I said, “Mr. Speaker, if you’d put a list—if

⁵⁷ On November 16, 1989, six Jesuits priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were murdered at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

⁵⁸ Thomas S. Foley (1929-), a Democrat, represented Washington State’s Fifth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1969 to 1995. He served as Speaker of the House from 1989 to 1995.

you'd put a request on the bulletin board, you'd have 434 members, but you wouldn't have me on it." He said, "I know, that's why I'm calling." I said, "All right. I'll take it."⁵⁹

He said, "I wanted somebody who didn't have a bag full of baggage; all their other foreign affairs meanderings." So we went in there and didn't cost a penny; I just worked out of my Rules Committee thing and went down there, did our own investigations. The embassy kept putting us on the sanitation road, you know, didn't want us to get near anything. And it was very, very awakening. I'll tell you, frightening at times. I mean a couple of times I thought I was going to get killed, because we ended up in the car with big machine guns, and I wasn't sure who they were. But it turned out all right, and we were able to put the Moakley Report into the—right into the case against them, part of the evidence.

ALLISON: So you found out who had done this?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. We found out through—who had been there. So they indicted twenty-six military people. You know, about four of them were found guilty, but up until then no military men had ever been found guilty of any crime for a civilian. But the whole thing changed around, and then we did a real job on—you know, our country spent six billion dollars on military aid to El Salvador in a ten-year period. It was the largest military money to any country with the exception of Israel. And it was a country the size of Massachusetts. So we ended up passing legislation to cut off the aid, so when the aid was cut off, there was nothing else to fight for; so they got together, and the people who were shooting against each other and working against each other are now serving in the parliament down there. We had a lot of very scary moments.

In fact, the last time I went down, I was invited down to speak at the tenth anniversary; the State Department says, "There's been a death threat on your life." I said, "Okay." He said, "No. This is real. We know who the people are, and they can do it." I said, "So what do you want?" He said, "We don't think you should go." I said, "BS. If they're going to keep me away by a death threat, then, you know, what good is this whole thing?" He said, "Well if you go, you're going

⁵⁹ In December of 1989, Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley appointed Moakley as chairman of a committee to investigate violence in El Salvador, specifically the Jesuit murders. The committee is commonly referred to as the Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador or the Moakley Commission.

to have to bring—we're going to have to go with you." And so I said, "Okay." So they put a couple of guys with me, and we went down there, and they got the guy that made the threat. And he said, "Well, he says he said it, but he really didn't mean it." But, you know, he happened to be the head of a big kind of a—almost like a National Guard unit, so I mean he had the ability to do it, but we went down there, and it turned out all right.

McETTRICK: Did anyone ever figure out exactly what the motivation was? Was this some political retaliation?

MOAKLEY: Killing the Jesuits?

McETTRICK: Yeah.

MOAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

McETTRICK: It seemed such a grotesque thing to do.

MOAKLEY: Well the Jesuits were teaching liberation theology.⁶⁰ And that theology doesn't go over well in those countries. And the military regarded that as aiding the enemy. And it was just—they couldn't see it any other way, but the people they killed were six internationally known educators. I mean these people weren't just village priests. I mean these were Jesuits, Spanish Jesuits also.

It was a terrible thing. What they did is the Atlacatl Battalion,⁶¹ which was the crack battalion, trained in North Carolina, trained in human rights, okay? They were in the area, and they went through like the day before or two days before the killings, to check out the unit. What's going on—and all this stuff and they knew where everybody was. What happened in the meantime, after they had left, there was a husband and wife and their daughter who came and asked them if

⁶⁰ Liberation theology is a school of thought that focuses on using religious faith to combat poverty and oppression. It has been popular particularly among Latin American Catholics. (See <http://www.liberationtheology.org>)

⁶¹ The Atlacatl Battalion was a Salvadoran army battalion that was formed and trained at the U.S. military's School of the Americas, which trains mainly Latin American military groups in security and defense tactics. Members of the Atlacatl Battalion were found to be responsible for the Jesuit murders.

they could live there—stay overnight, because their house had been blown up. So they stayed in the place just a little away from everybody else. The military didn't know this, so when they went through shooting up, these people are looking out the window and, you know, seeing. And they tried to suppress the girl's evidence. The FBI tried to suppress it. Okay?

I mean we were fighting our own country on this one. So they tried to suppress it, and they got a hold of it, and then she told me, "Oh, they wanted to suppress it," because they said her stories—they asked her once, and she gave one set of stories, asked her a second time, they gave another set of stories. Her name was Lucía Cerna, and she got high blood pressure.

So we had her in the office. We got her in, and I asked her I said, "How come you told one story one time, and the other story?" So she says, "Well, the FBI brought me into Miami. They asked me to tell the story, and I told the story. Then after I told the story—a colonel from El Salvador came into the room, and says, "I hope you know what you're saying. You know, you still got your family down there." He intimidated her. Now there was no report and no activity that this fellow walked in the room. But he was telling her, so then she changed the story. But nowhere did it appear on the FBI records that this happened.

In fact, there was another thing that happened. We had information that a lieutenant in the American Army, Buckland, bonded with a lieutenant colonel, named Aviles, in the El Salvador Army, and they became very friendly, and Aviles told him about the killing of the Jesuits. So Buckland thought he owed this fellow some kind of allegiance, so he didn't say anything, but it got to him in about a couple of weeks, then he finally went to the U.S. Embassy and said, "Hey, look it, I got this information."

(interruption)

MOAKLEY: All right. So this General Buckland bonded with Lieutenant Colonel Aviles, and the Lieutenant Colonel Aviles told him about the killings of the Jesuits and how it happened. So he held it about two weeks, and he couldn't hold it anymore. So he goes to the U.S. Embassy

and the ambassador is not there. So he meets the U.S. military guy, so when he tells him the story, he says, “Wow.” He says, “Come on. Let’s go and see General Ponce.”

Now General Ponce is the minister of defense for El Salvador. So he tells him the story, and Ponce says, “I can’t believe that. I know Colonel Aviles. He would never say anything like that.” He said, “Well he did say it.” He says, “Well if you want to insist on that, why don’t you write a note, and get the note to me.” So he wrote the note. You know, the average fellow, if a guy says, “I don’t believe it. Would you write a note?” that would have been the end of it. He’d figure, “This guy is not going to believe me.” So he wrote the note and the State Department got wind of it, because the American military man was there. In fact, he sent a copy of the note, I guess, to his sister to make sure he wasn’t going to get killed.

So that note was there, and it explained everything. So when I went down there, I got wind that there was some kind of correspondence between Buckland. So I stood up; I said, “Mr. Ambassador, that letter that Buckland wrote to General Ponce,” I says, “I’d like to take a look at it.” He said, “Okay. We’ll let you see it tomorrow.” So tomorrow comes by, I said, “I’d like to see that letter.” He said, “Well, the secretary of state said it’s classified against you.” I said, “Look it, this is part of the investigation—this is the investigation. I need that letter.” “I’m sorry, it’s classified.” So I said to McGovern, “Let’s go.” So we went to the El Salvador CIA equivalent. I saw the top guy, and I said, “Look it, I want to talk about Buckland and the letter that he talks about Colonel Aviles and the killing of the Jesuits.” He says, “Okay.” I said, “I left it at the hotel.” I said, “You got a copy?” He says, “Yeah. I’ll get you a copy.”

So he runs off a copy and I said, “Geez, I left my glasses,” so that’s how I got the copy. I couldn’t get it from our own place, but the whole thing was the same way. I’d tell the State Department—“Oh, yeah, we sent that down.” We’d find out they never sent it down. They just were stalling, because they just couldn’t tell the American people that we’ve spent six billion dollars to a military group that killed priests, sodomized churchwomen, you know, and did all these terrible things. Because they just thought they were immune to any kind of prosecution.

McETTRICK: Well, you know, over the years there's been a connection, really between Boston and the West Indies, Cuba, sugar trade back and forth, and the First National Bank was big down there. What do you think the future is with respect to our relations with Cuba? How do you think that's going to go?

MOAKLEY: Well President Bush just appointed a fellow to represent—our representative to Cuba, who has got a record of being very-very much anti-Castro. So it doesn't look like much is going to happen. And that's a terrible thing; the people in Cuba love the American people, the only people who have problems are the governments.

I'm just sorry to say that our government has still got the 1959 mentality. I mean you got to forget and start somewhere. When I talked with Castro, you know, I don't say he's the best guy in the world—when I think of Cuba, I don't think of Castro. I think of this three-year-old kid I saw in a pediatric hospital with a tracheotomy that lost a lung because they didn't have this plastic shunt that was so available ninety miles away in Miami. I mean people with malnutrition down there. This country sends them all the insulin for their diabetic people. Their pharmaceuticals are almost nothing. In fact, I had a group down there a couple of years ago and we set up some kind of liaison between some of our Massachusetts pharmaceutical people and them, and Schepens Eye Institute is now giving a Cuban doctor a fellowship to study some of the eye diseases. So little by little we're doing it, but the administration has got to go.

In fact, last year or the year before, we passed a law that says American citizens could travel there. We didn't pass the law. We passed it in the House that American citizens could travel freely and they could spend money, and the farmers could give wheat loans, but the Republicans just pulled it out at the last minute. And I just think it's so terrible. It's a country ninety miles away. We don't need to make an incendiary relationship with a country ninety miles away, but that's the Cuban Americans.

I think the Elian Gonzalez⁶² case clearly showed the horrendous power those people have. I mean they alone are responsible for the embargo still being on all these years. If you can't cure something with an embargo after five or ten years, you got to go somewhere else. And the problem is every other country in the world is trading with Cuba, but us. And we could clean their clock, because we're only ninety miles away.

McETTRICK: How did you have occasion to meet Castro? How did you get down to meet him?

MOAKLEY: He sent for me. Yeah, as a result of my work in El Salvador, I met some of the rebels that I dealt with, evidently were connected with his people. So after we kind of put the El Salvador situation to bed, I just got a liver transplant in July, and this was about August-September, so McGovern walks over to the office. He says, "Castro wants to talk to you." I said, "I don't need any couches." He said, "Not that Castro, the Castro in Cuba." I said, "What's he want to talk to me about?" "I don't know, his man said that you had talked with Villalobos⁶³ and a few other people and that you talked with Juan Tung (??), and he'd just like to talk with you." I said, "Jim, I'm not feeling well." He says, "Well just think about it."

So that following January, Castro is coming to New York. We get another call. So McGovern said, "Look, I want you to go up and meet him." I said, "Okay." So I go up and Jesus, there's thousands of people around throwing rocks. "You Castro Communist lover!" I said, "What the hell did you get me into?" So anyway, we went inside and Castro made the rounds of everybody in the room, and when he got to me and he was introduced to me, he grabbed me by the lapel, and he kissed me on the cheeks, and he said through an interpreter, "Very nice to meet you." He said, "I want to talk to you." I said, "Okay." He said, "I want to talk to you in my country, in Cuba." I says, "Fine." (phone rings)

⁶² Elian Gonzales is a Cuban boy who fled Cuba in 1999 with his mother and several other people in a small boat headed for the United States. After the boat sank and most of the people aboard died, Elian and two survivors were found by some fishermen and turned over to the U.S. Coast Guard. A custody battle ensued between Elian's uncle in the U.S., who thought he should remain there, and his father in Cuba, who claimed Elian was taken by his mother without his knowledge. A district court in Atlanta ruled that Elian's uncle could not claim asylum for him, and after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, Elian was returned to his father in Cuba.

⁶³ Joaquin Villalobos (1951-) led El Salvador's People's Revolution Army, one of the five groups that joined in 1980 to form the FMLN.

So he says, “You’ll come?” I says, “Yeah.” He says, “When?” It’s not like dropping in for a cup of coffee. I says, “I don’t know.” He says, “Could you get down?” I said, “Okay.” So I come down. So I brought—at that time I think I did bring down some human rights people. (phone rings)

MOAKLEY: He grabbed me by the lapels, so he said, you know, “I want to see you down there.” I said, “Okay. Okay.” He said, “When?” I said, “I’ll make some time.” He said, “Soon.” I said, “Okay.” So we went down there, and we brought these human rights people. In fact, the State Department didn’t want to let us go. So they said, “You can’t bring them because they’re businessmen.” I said, “Well who can I bring?” He says, “Human rights experts.” So I made them all human rights experts. “So then if you go there, you can’t visit the tobacco—you can’t tour the tobacco companies.” So I said, “Okay.” We didn’t tour them. We just visited them.

Then if you meet with the ministers, you have to bring all the dissidents with you. I says, “For Christ’s sakes, that’s like bringing all your girlfriends when you propose to your wife. Give me a break, will you?” But they kept throwing these obstacles, obstacles. In fact, we didn’t get the ticket, we didn’t get the permission to visit Cuba—now this is the first legitimate trip to Cuba authorized by the State Department—we didn’t get the authorization until the plane that left Boston landed in Florida. Now those guys didn’t know it, or they probably wouldn’t have gotten on the plane, and that’s when we got it. But they just threw every kind of thing—it’s just terrible. It’s all fear of that Cuban militia down in Florida.

McETRICK: So how is it physically when you went to visit? Heavy security?

MOAKLEY: No. It’s great. I mean they opened up—we could go any place we want. There was nothing—in fact McGovern and I met with Castro and an interpreter in a room about three or four times as long as this, and one table between us. We just had a nice conversation back and

forth and talked about everything. And finally I said, “Look it, if you—they’re working on a bill now that’s going to make trading with Cuba almost impossible, the Helms-Burton bill.⁶⁴ I said “I think if you say you’re going to order free elections, if you’re going to free the dissidents and if you can just be a little bit more open in your policy,” I said, “it might be enough to forestall that.” He said, “We’ll see.”

(interruption)

MOAKLEY: We met about eleven o’clock. We finished up at one o’clock. I mean, he’s a vampire. He has these nocturnal meetings, and when we got through, he said through an interpreter, he said, “You know”—here’s an atheist. He said, “God must have wanted us to be friends or why would he only put us ninety miles apart?” Then we had some fun. We gave him a Red Sox jacket and gave him all this stuff. I have a picture of it. In fact, I had him sign a baseball, because he was a baseball player at one time. Then I went down when the Pope was there. Then I went down one other time. So I’ve been in Cuba three or four times.

McETRICK: How was the Pope greeted in Cuba?

MOAKLEY: Oh boy! I’ve never seen such an outpouring. In fact, Castro said that Cuba will never be the same, because all these people came out; you know, for a while there, Castro had discontinued the saying of Mass or observing any Catholic rites, and now when the Pope came, he backed down again.

McETRICK: You had occasion to meet the Pope, too, recently didn’t you?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. I traveled with Speaker Hastert,⁶⁵ and we presented him with the Medal of Freedom for his work in human rights, and he was great. He’d give you the blessing. He said, “I bless not only you, but I bless all your constituents.” Then when he was leaving he said, “God

⁶⁴ The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, or Helms-Burton Act, was passed in 1996 to strengthen and continue the United States embargo against Cuba.

⁶⁵ John Dennis Hastert (1942-), a Republican, represented Illinois’ Fourteenth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1987 to 2007. He served as Speaker of the House from 1999 to 2007.

bless America.” In fact, the Pope doesn’t take honors. He took this because he felt that we were the peace-loving country dedicated to eradicating human rights abuse. So therefore, he would take the award.

McETTRICK: It must have been quite an honor, quite an experience.

MOAKLEY: Oh, it sure was, and he was great. You know, usually when people say, “I had an audience with the Pope,” they’re one of four hundred people in a big room. Every one of us knelt and kissed his ring and had our picture taken doing it, it was great.

McETTRICK: How would you say the district has changed since you became a congressman? It’s been a long time now almost thirty years? Of course, it wanders around geographically from one redistricting to the next. But in terms of the people and it’s—is it much the same or is it a different situation?

MOAKLEY: Well, I read somewhere that since 1980 South Boston has changed 50 percent. So that people do change, and I think the reason for that is because people have been offered so much money for their homes. I mean homes that were probably selling for fifty-thousand dollars a few years ago, you can get two-hundred fifty thousand dollars now for them now. So that’s pretty hard to say no to, so people take it and run.

McETTRICK: But the issues that go across your desk are still really much the same?

MOAKLEY: Yeah. People are people. Yeah. Crime was big for a while, but it’s not. Education is one of the top things now. People want the best schools for their kids. That’s about the main issue.

McETTRICK: So there will be other congressmen from Massachusetts going down and trying to deal with these problems. What advice would you be giving to them? You’ve been on the watch for so long. What should they look out for? What should they do for the people of Massachusetts when they get down there?

MOAKLEY: Serving in Congress is like living in the neighborhood. You can't impress your neighbor unless he's got some faith in you. You've got to build up relationships. You've got to let people know you. You've got to do a lot of listening, and you've got to realize that nobody has a monopoly on new ideas. Some of the best ideas could come from outside of the system. But just listen. I mean most people in public life like to talk, but I mean if you do more listening than talking, I think you're ahead of the game.

ALLISON: It could be why you're the most popular member of Congress.

MOAKLEY: Because I've listened a lot, yeah. Sometimes it's tough—the problem with public life, a lot of egos get in the way. I mean some people get such gigantic egos that everybody is afraid to make that first step, ask the first question or—because it looks like a sign of weakness, you're asking for something. I'm not. I'd just as soon walk across the aisle anytime, ask anybody for anything I wanted to, but I think that a lot of that has to do with growing up on the street corners and knowing, what can be done; what can't be done. Growing up in the projects, living together like the guy upstairs, downstairs and over the back fence; and in that upstairs, downstairs and over the back fence, that becomes maybe the next city or the next town, the next state, the next country. But people are people.

McETTRICK: The same principle!

MOAKLEY: That's right.

McETTRICK: Are there other areas that you wanted us to get into? I mean we're having the chance to put everything down on tape. You've got a pretty good working over here.

MOAKLEY: You know, when you talk for fifty years, there's so many ways you can go. I'd just as soon be answering questions.

ALLISON: I'm just thinking about some of the personalities who have been involved in politics—when you were—James Michael Curley⁶⁶ once represented the Ninth District.

MOAKLEY: Yeah. No. He was Tip O'Neill's district.

ALLISON: But actually in 1914, he represented this district, then Gallivan⁶⁷ took his seat when he became mayor. I'm not confusing the subject.

MOAKLEY: No. But I thought that—

ALLISON: He represented both districts.

MOAKLEY: Oh, okay.

ALLISON: Way back. Do you remember him?

MOAKLEY: I remember him as a kid starting out, you know, I was in politics when he was leaving. In fact, my office in D.C. is the—or was where James Michael Curley had his office. Yeah. He couldn't exist in today's thing, but for those days, maybe that's what they needed. It's a different world.

ALLISON: And you said that you regarded Speaker McCormack as something like a saint?

MOAKLEY: Oh, absolutely.

ALLISON: What kind of contact did you ever have with him? How did you see him when you were growing up in South Boston?

⁶⁶ James Michael Curley (1874-1958), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston for four non-consecutive terms: 1914 to 1918, 1922 to 1926, 1930 to 1934, and 1946 to 1950, and as governor of Massachusetts from 1935 to 1937. He also represented Massachusetts' Twelfth Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives from 1911 to 1914 and the Eleventh Congressional District from 1943 to 1946. He served jail time in the late 1940s for official misconduct, but remained in office as mayor during that time.

⁶⁷ James A. Gallivan (1866-1928), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Eleventh Congressional District from 1914 to 1928.

MOAKLEY: Well, when I was one, Speaker McCormack was elected to Congress. When I was forty-two he stepped down, so he was the only man I ever knew as a congressman. I thought “congressman” and “McCormack” was synonymous, you know? But he always had a very saintly attitude, and the way he treated women, I mean he just put every woman on a pedestal, and he would never use a nickname, like Tip O’Neill was always “Thomas.” And Joe Moakley was always, “John.” I mean he just didn’t go for any of those things.

A very bright fellow, good memory, good congressman, but much to himself, though in his off hours. Like Tip is just the opposite. Tip is gregarious. I mean you walk down, everybody knows Tip. I mean he’s probably the most visible speaker ever, and it was partly done because Reagan made it so, because the fights that he and Reagan had together. I remember being in China with O’Neill on the Wall and some of the Chinese people pointing to him, knowing he was somebody, but probably didn’t know exactly who he was.

McETTRICK: What were you doing in China? What was the contact?

MOAKLEY: We went over and met with Deng Xiaoping and some of the ministers—and this was back in 1980—went to the Forbidden City, talked about trade policies. Went to Hong Kong and Singapore, and it was quite a swath.

McETTRICK: What were your impressions of Cardinal Cushing?⁶⁸ He was another son of South Boston.

MOAKLEY: The best. He could have been the best politician in the town rather than the best Cardinal.

McETTRICK: He may have been.

⁶⁸ Richard Cardinal Cushing (1895-1970), who was raised in South Boston, was a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. He served as Archbishop of Boston from 1944 to 1970 and became a cardinal in 1958.

MOAKLEY: Okay.

McETTRICK: Well, I think that's good. We've covered a lot of ground. Thank you. We appreciate your time. It was very enjoyable. It was an honor, really.

MOAKLEY: Maybe if my memory gets better, maybe we can talk about something else.

END OF INTERVIEW