



SUFFOLK  
UNIVERSITY

## Oral History Interview of John Weinfurter (OH-055)

Moakley Archive and Institute

[www.suffolk.edu/moakley](http://www.suffolk.edu/moakley)

[archives@suffolk.edu](mailto:archives@suffolk.edu)

### Oral History Interview of John Weinfurter

**Interview Date:** June 15, 2005

**Interviewed by:** Beth Anne Bower, Moakley Archivist

**Citation:** Weinfurter, John. Interviewed by Beth Anne Bower. John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project OH-055. 15 June 2005. Transcript and audio available. John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

**Copyright Information:** Copyright ©2005, Suffolk University.

#### Interview Summary

Mr. John Weinfurter, a member of Congressman John Joseph Moakley's congressional staff from 1977 to 1996, discusses his time working with Congressman Moakley. He discusses Moakley's committee work, especially his role as chairman of the House Rules Committee and on the Steering and Policy Committee; Moakley's core issues, including development and historic preservation in Boston and human rights in El Salvador; Moakley's role as Moakley's relationships with his staff and his congressional colleagues; and Moakley's commitment to public service.

#### Subject Headings

Boston (Mass.)

Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001

United States. Congress. House

United States. Congress. House. Committee on Rules

Weinfurter, John

#### Table of Contents

**Mr. Weinfurter's background and early career** p. 3 (00:02)

**Moakley's committee work** p. 5 (05:40)

<b>Development and historic preservation in Boston</b>	<b>p. 9</b> (15:26)
<b>Moakley's involvement in El Salvador</b>	<b>p. 15</b> (26:45)
<b>Changes in Congress during the past thirty years</b>	<b>p. 18</b> (33:47)
<b>Moakley's congressional relationships</b>	<b>p. 19</b> (36:27)
<b>Moakley's commitment to public service</b>	<b>p. 20</b> (38:47)
<b>Evelyn Moakley</b>	<b>p. 21</b> (41:40)
<b>Mr. Weinfurter's work for Moakley</b>	<b>p. 22</b> (43:10)
<b>Moakley's relationships with his staff</b>	<b>p. 24</b> (47:49)
<b>More on Moakley's committee work and commitment to public service</b>	<b>p. 26</b> (50:49)
<b>Final reflections</b>	<b>p. 27</b> (54:28)

**Interview transcript begins on next page**

This interview took place on June 15, 2005, at the law offices of Kimmit, Senter, Coates & Weinfurter in Washington, D.C.

### **Interview Transcript**

**BETH BOWER:** This is Beth Bower; we're in the offices of Kimmit, Senter, Coates, and Weinfurter, to interview John Weinfurter, former chief of staff for Congressman Joe Moakley. And John, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us. Why don't we start with a little background on you, where you grew up and how you ended up in Washington, D.C.

**JOHN WEINFURTER:** Sure. I grew up in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, which is a suburb outside of Milwaukee, as the oldest of nine kids in my family. Went to Catholic high school in Wisconsin, went to Marquette University, a Jesuit high school—or a Jesuit college in Wisconsin. And moved out to Washington in 1973 as a twenty-two year old and tracked down a job at the Democratic National Committee [DNC] for a couple of years, and went to Georgetown for grad school. And in that context, ran into a guy named Nelson Hammel,<sup>1</sup> who was Joe Moakley's first chief of staff after his election in 1973. And I had been at the DNC at that point for three or so years and Nelson had a press opening in Mr. Moakley's office and asked me if I would be interested. So I spent a couple of days briefing myself on Boston political issues, on background of members of the New England delegation, on Mr. Moakley and his record as a state legislator and a city council member. And I went into my interview only to find that there was no interview, and that I started a week later. So then all the way through the process of formally interviewing for jobs in the Moakley office was somewhat obtuse to put it mildly. (laughter) A lot of decisions were made before you were even aware of the decision being made; it appears then and until the time that I left it was sort of just performing.

So I spent from January of '77 until June of '96 in Mr. Moakley's office. For the first year or two I was his press secretary and primarily wrote a lot of his speeches, coordinated all of his post office visits, a lot of his outreach efforts in the neighborhoods and in the towns that comprised the Ninth Congressional District. Nelson wound up in a situation where he had some personal

---

<sup>1</sup> Nelson Hammel was a member of Moakley's Washington staff from 1974 to 1981.

family business that he had to take care of. His wife was an Iranian refugee and had left Iran with the fall of the shah in 1977, and actually presented Nelson with a bunch of business opportunities, so he departed our staff and Joe named me his chief of staff when I was twenty-eight I think, which is pretty young, then especially.

Now I think that now that's not the case; I think there are a good number of chiefs of staff that are in their late twenties or early thirties. But when I became his chief of staff I felt like I was the new kid on the block surrounded by all of these legendary people like Joe Donahue in Mr. Boland's<sup>2</sup> office and Leo Diehl in Mr. O'Neill's<sup>3</sup> office who were thirty and forty and fifty years older than me. But that was the way it was.

**BOWER:** That's great. When you first started in the office Congressman Moakley was a fairly new representative.

**WEINFURTER:** He was. Second term.

**BOWER:** What were some of the issues the office was dealing with at that point? And what committees was he on at that point?

**WEINFURTER:** When I came to the staff in 1977, Mr. Moakley had just been named to Mr. O'Neill's seat on Rules [Committee],<sup>4</sup> because Mr. O'Neill had just been elevated to Speaker. So that was kind of new for Joe as well, and he had left a seat on Banking and Veterans' Affairs I think to assume the seat on Rules. With that seat on Rules came one more staff position, so Jack

---

<sup>2</sup> Edward P. Boland (1911-2001), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Second Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1989.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> The House Rules Committee is responsible for the scheduling of bills for discussion in the House of Representatives. According to the Rules Committee website, "bills are scheduled by means of special rules from the Rules Committee that bestow upon legislation priority status for consideration in the House and establish procedures for their debate and amendment." (See <http://www.rules.house.gov/>) Congressman Moakley was a member of the House Rules Committee from 1975 to 2001 and served as its chairman from 1989 to 1995.

Dooling,<sup>5</sup> who I think you've heard of before, left his job as Joe's legislative director and became his Rules Committee staff associate.

We also picked up at that time or very shortly thereafter another kind of an official responsibility and that was to chair the Democratic Personnel Committee. I think that happened in February or March of '77. And that was traditionally given by the speaker to someone from his own state delegation to oversee hiring of people that kept the wheels on the train and kept the formal institution of the House moving forward. And under the purview of the House Patronage Committee, came the Sergeant at Arms Office, the Doorkeeper's Office, the Postmaster's Office, the Capitol Police; maybe half a dozen organizations but a large number of employees. We had probably two or three thousand people that fell within the personnel office, which was an enormous amount of responsibility. And Joe's executive assistant at that time was a woman named Yvonne White, so she left our personnel office as well and went to become the executive director of the Democratic Personnel Committee. So the winter and spring of 1977 brought a lot of changes to Joe's office: me, a new legislative director, a new executive assistant. We had a good number of staff changes, but that was pretty much it for the next fifteen years. We had almost no changes for so long.

**BOWER:** That's great. So while we're talking about the Democratic Personnel Committee—so when there was a vacancy, in any of the people that were under the Personnel Committee, it was Congressman Moakley's or the committee's responsibility to fill those positions. And so that would have meant that he had to work with a lot of members on that issue. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**WEINFURTER:** Incredibly so. Sure. The function of the Democratic Personnel Committee was to keep the organization and the institution of the House moving forward. They had employment procedures in effect, application processes in effect. And they would recruit and hire people on their own, but they would also recruit and hire people and solicit input from Democratic members of the House. So I think that you could probably make a statement that the members of Congress that were from a geographically more close in area in terms of its proximity to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Jack Dooling was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1974 to 1990.

District of Columbia were much more involved in helping the Democratic Personnel Committee staff its various functions. There were lots of jokes going around during that time period about how every elevator operator and every cop had a South Boston, Massachusetts, accent, but I think that was enormously exaggerated.

Basically we had programs and procedures in effect that controlled how and who and under what circumstances people would be considered for any number of a variety of those jobs. But it did give Joe the opportunity to talk to members of Congress all the time about a constituent that they might have, a member of their family, a friend, et cetera who might be looking for employment and Joe was incredibly adept at finding slots to put people that he thought were competent and qualified and in some cases connected to somebody else in the organization, and it did build him a very nice and productive orbit that he circulated in for a long time.

**BOWER:** How many members were on that committee?

**WEINFURTER:** I think there were five.

**BOWER:** Five members. And is that a majority party committee?

**WEINFURTER:** Yes. The Democrats had a personnel committee and the Republicans had a personnel committee, and obviously Democrats controlled at that point in time more than the Republicans did, although my understanding is that after the 1994 Republican take over of the Congress that the whole personnel system was revamped and it's now largely devoid of political background. Although I have to say that, under Joe's term, I don't think he ever once asked an applicant what his or her political background was; we just wanted to make sure they could do the job, not what their background was.

**BOWER:** Great. Thank you. So Congressman Moakley took Speaker O'Neill's chair on the Rules Committee. And how did you see him grow in that role?

**WEINFURTER:** Oh, it was immediate and visible. You could see his stature within the

institution grow. You could see his self-confidence, in terms of Joe's inherent awareness of his leadership abilities grow. As a junior member at that point on the Rules Committee under Mr. Boland's chairmanship then under Mr. Pepper's<sup>6</sup> chairmanship, you could see that members would come to Mr. Moakley on the floor asking for his help and the committee's help on any number of their various legislative projects. And Joe being the kind of guy that he was, would always give his ear and a whole lot more than his ear; he would very often do whatever he could to advance a member's legislative project. He would I think always feel very strongly that the least he could do as a member at that point, a junior member of the committee, and even when he became chairman, was to give that member a theater to talk about his project and to have members sit back and listen and decide if that project and their judgment could go forward. And Joe I think always had an open door policy in terms of talking to members about Rules Committee consideration of their legislation.

**BOWER:** Thank you. Besides the committee structure, there was also a party leadership structure in place in the House. And was Congressman Moakley appointed to any positions in that regard during your tenure?

**WEINFURTER:** He sure was. He held several positions on the course of my tenure on the Hill. He was—I think almost the entire time I was on the Hill, for almost twenty years, he served as a majority whip in the House. And essentially, his job in that capacity was to be Speaker O'Neill's eyes and ears on the floor, to assist in counting votes on upcoming issues. I think that he also had a responsibility to be on the floor and to sort of poll members on gauging Mr. O'Neill's and the Democratic leadership's effectiveness on issues to try to hone their message machine, to try to figure out where we're going as a party in terms of what we're doing in the House.

He had the very great asset of being Tip O'Neill's probably closest friend in the House. I think that—from 1977 through the mideighties, I think that Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Boland, Mr. Conte,<sup>7</sup> a

---

<sup>6</sup> Claude D. Pepper (1900-1989), a Democrat, represented the state of Florida in the U.S. Senate from 1935 to 1950, then represented Florida's Miami-area congressional district in the House of Representatives from 1963 until his death. He served as chairman of the House Rules Committee from 1983 to 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Silvio Conte (1921-1991), a Republican, served in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1951 to 1958, then represented Massachusetts' First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959 to 1991.

republican, Mr. Murtha,<sup>8</sup> from Pennsylvania, were probably five guys or six guys that talked everyday, sometimes every hour of every day. I can't underestimate how often those members talked and how often they stayed in touch with each other, officially and unofficially. And I've always said in talking about my time on the Hill, that's, I think, one of the saddest things that's happening on the Hill now, is the lack of those social constructs that we enjoyed when Joe and I were on the Hill, in terms of dinners between members that occurred Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursday nights, all the time. Dinners between representatives of industrial groups and universities, et cetera, in a members' district, and it kept members' ear to the wall, they knew what was going on, they built on their relationships. And I think that it's a much more frigid atmosphere on the Hill now. And I think the communication process has been dramatically and negatively impacted, and I think you probably have a less informed House now than you did then.

**BOWER:** What made Congressman Moakley effective as a whip?

**WEINFURTER:** He was an open book. I think that he very much took the job of a whip to heart. I think that he thought he could move on the floor as an agent of the Speaker and the majority leader and I think he did it well. I think he had some interest in his own career in terms of rising in the leadership; I'd be a fool if I said I didn't think that was the case. But I think that he served Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Wright,<sup>9</sup> Mr. Foley<sup>10</sup> incredibly well through all those years.

One of his other leadership jobs during that time period was also as a member of the Steering and Policy Committee. And for me, as his chief of staff, that was an incredibly fun, fun, fun committee because you get a chance to meet newly elected members of Congress and their staffs before almost anyone else as they came in to meet with Mr. Moakley to press their case for selection for committee A, committee B, committee C, committee D, whatever their committee needs might be. And it was just a fascinating process to be part of the Steering and Policy

---

<sup>8</sup> John "Jack" Murtha, Jr. (1932- ), a Democrat, has represented Pennsylvania's Twelfth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1974. He served as chair of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee from 1991 to 1995, then became chair again in 2007.

<sup>9</sup> James Claude Wright, Jr. (1922- ), a Democrat, represented Texas's Twelfth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1955 to 1989. He served as Speaker of the House from 1987 to 1989.

Committee and to watch how that committee operated and how that committee took each member's academic background, took each member's employment background, took the political needs of that member's district to heart in trying to figure out what the Steering and Policy Committee could do in terms of giving that member a committee that would suit him or her the best. And I think that it was fun, and I think that the members on Steering and Policy enjoyed their work, and I think by and large they thought that over the years they did a very good job in making sure that you had good members with some background in an issue area on a committee that controlled those kinds of issues.

**BOWER:** And that is an important first step for a new member.

**WEINFURTER:** It's the most important step in terms of what committee do you get.

**BOWER:** And so it was a combination of not only formal letters that I understand that the members wrote and requested, but also an evaluation and conversations.

**WEINFURTER:** Right. And then it was largely, my understanding is, devoid of money. You didn't have to wage a political campaign with contributions to your national political organizations showing your worthiness for a committee assignment as you do today. These days, I think on both sides of the aisle I hate to say, I think that if you're a freshman member, and you're demonstrating your interest in committee A, B, C, or D, you also have to show your financial abilities to be able to raise money to support the goals of the party. That certainly was not part of what we did when Joe was on steering and policy; that never entered the picture at all.

**BOWER:** I wanted to ask you about one major piece of legislation I know happened in that time period, and maybe it's not a good example, but I'll bring it up and if you think of a better one, let me know, and that's the Service Transportation Act of 1987, which I believe was vetoed by President Reagan, and then had to be overwritten by the House. Can you talk a little bit about that process?

---

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Stephen 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.

**WEINFURTER:** Well I didn't do that issue, but I remember the debate. And then, as is now, when you have a service transportation bill or a highway bill, it becomes just an enormous conduit for projects that members have. I think there are lots of similarities between the highway bill that we're debating right now in the House and Senate and the one that was built over two or three years back then if, I recall correctly.

The bill that we had on the floor in 1987 was one that actually occurred—was written in the previous Congress, very much like this year's transportation bill is; it was one that was written in the previous Congress. And there is no better vehicle, I think, for members of Congress to add their own pet projects onto than a highway bill, because the very nature of a highway bill is the network of roadways that connect towns and cities and states and municipalities all across the country, and run through neighborhoods and run through college campuses and run through military bases, and run through literally every neighborhood in the country so obviously it's a very understandable idea of why.

But I think that Mr. Moakley was very much involved in floor efforts and I think that his relationships with Republicans then was such that the Democratic leadership—Mr. O'Neill could reach out to Joe and talk to members across the aisle about, "This is a methodology that we have at our disposal that we don't often use," that being the override. And they overrode Reagan's deal, and they overrode it I think by a pretty significant margin because you had an organization of 435 members, you probably have 434 that had projects on that bill.

And I think the Democratic leadership then was quite comfortable and quite capable of demonstrating to members what the consequences would be of the veto being sustained. And it was, I think, a relatively easy thing to do, as I think it would be this time around because, as you know, President [George W.] Bush has already said that if the highway bill comes to his desk this year in 2005 looking the way he thinks it currently looks, he will also veto. And the Republican leadership even in the House is saying, We think we have the votes to override. So I think you could see history repeating itself eighteen years later.

**BOWER:** Interesting.

**WEINFURTER:** Exactly.

**BOWER:** So what issues were in the forefront, or did you work on, in your early years in the office say through the mid to late eighties?

**WEINFURTER:** I bet that the issues I worked on were the same issues that Joe worked on through his whole tenure. We were always very much concerned with veterans' benefits. We had a huge, huge number of veterans that lived in our district. Military service was always an honorable call to kids from private and public high schools in the Ninth Congressional District. We had enormous numbers of returned Vietnam veterans then who were suffering all sorts of impact from their tenure in Vietnam. We had—Joe was very active in setting up clinics for post-traumatic stress for Vietnam-era veterans; worked very closely with veterans' chapters all throughout the state and the country. As a World War II veteran himself, he certainly knew battle and he knew what the consequences were. I think he worked very hard in providing health care for returned World War II veterans, as he was. He probably took part in veterans activities throughout his entire tenure, all thirty years in the House. He was always very active with those issues.

We were also involved in lots of development issues in downtown Boston. We worked with private sector developmental people often. We worked on historic preservation issues. That's an area that I worked on a lot. Mr. Moakley, luckily, had just an incredible relationship with Representative Sidney Yates,<sup>11</sup> who was then the chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Committee, and to this day I talk to his—Sidney Yates' chief of staff. Sidney Yates was an elderly member of Congress when I was on the Hill and died at ninety-five or ninety-six several years ago, but his chief of staff, Mary Bain, is alive and well and living in Chicago, and she's

---

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Richard Yates (1909-2000), a Democrat, represented Illinois's Ninth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1949 to 1963 and from 1965 to 1999. He served as chair of the House Appropriations Committee Interior Subcommittee from 1975 to 1995.

probably ninety-five herself, but I keep in touch with her, I talk to her every couple of years. And we, in the course of Joe's tenure in the House, developed this incredibly warm working relationship with Mr. Yates.

And Joe also had a very good working relationship with the historic preservation community in Massachusetts. And in his sit-downs with historic preservation people up there, we decided that what was lacking was any kind of structure for a lot of the historic sites in Joe's district and throughout the area. So we developed a concept called the Freedom Trail, and what we did was each year we'd type up a letter to Mr. Yates for ten years, and each year Joe would go forward with a request for money from interior approps to handle the restoration of one such project: the Smith School, Dorchester Heights, Paul Revere's house, Bunker Hill. And what we did then in the course of Joe's twenty—first twenty years in Congress is we were able to link them all together and to formally ensconce them in something called the Massachusetts Freedom Trail, and we provided walkways and lighting and handicapped accessibility, and it's now one of the most heavily traveled tourist destinations on the East Coast.<sup>12</sup> And Joe did that all by himself with the incredibly generous assistance of Mr. Yates from Chicago. He was a tremendously effective member of Congress.

**BOWER:** And he also was very involved with the creation of the Boston African American Historic Site, which was the first—

**WEINFURTER:** And again with Mr. Yates' success; you cannot underestimate the role that Sidney Yates played in preserving and enhancing Boston's historic past. There should be a statue to Sid Yates somewhere in Boston. He was phenomenal. Generous with his time, generous with his committee's revenue. Just an incredibly close working relationship.

**BOWER:** Was Congressman Moakley's interest in historic preservation based on a vision that he had of Boston?

---

<sup>12</sup> In 1974, Moakley helped get legislation passed to create the Boston National Historical Park [BNHP] as a subdivision of the National Parks Service. Its eight sites are eligible to receive federal funding. The park consists of eight historic sites, seven of which are also part of the Boston's Freedom Trail, which was incorporated in 1964.

**WEINFURTER:** You know, I think so, and I think that growing up near the water, where he grew up, growing up in public housing, which was his childhood experience, I think that he always kind of yearned for Boston's glory days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. He saw Dorchester Heights on a day-to-day basis; I think he saw it slip into neglect and disrepair and it was always kind of a pain for him to see how poorly maintained it was. And we started with Dorchester Heights, that was the crux of the Freedom Trail in probably '78 or '79, and year after year after year at his direction we would pick another site. And we would work with the Massachusetts Parks people, with the historic preservation people, with some of the academic people up there and it was enormously entertaining for me. Fun, fun, fun to work on.

We worked on the National Trust for Historic Preservation here and in fact, one of Joe's last years and one of the last things that I did for him before I left Joe's staff, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Joe their man of the year and gave him the National Trust Medal at Faneuil Hall in, I think it was 1996; it was right before I left. And Joe delivered just an eloquent speech and Dick Moe, the president, then and now, of the Trust for Historic Preservation, came up to Boston and it was just a wonderful, wonderful evening.

We also worked on transportation issues at Logan Airport, the Runway 27 Coalition.<sup>13</sup> I know I talked to Kevin Ryan,<sup>14</sup> who is now Steve Lynch's<sup>15</sup> chief of staff, who was my successor, and I know that Steve Lynch has to deal a lot of the same community activists on some of those noise issues at Logan. And frankly that was an issue that I never figured out how we could ever resolve it. You have a huge airport in the middle of a huge city; there will always be noise I don't know what the answer there is now, I didn't know what the answer was in the eighties or nineties.

---

While the Freedom Trail is run independently of the BNHP, it benefits from the federal funding that the BNHP sites receive.

<sup>13</sup> The Runway 27 Coalition is a grassroots group that represents twenty-one communities that are in the flight path of Boston's Logan International Airport.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Ryan was Congressman Moakley's chief of staff at his Washington office from 1997 to 2000. OH-027 in the Moakley Oral History Project is an interview with Mr. Ryan.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen F. Lynch (1955- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since Moakley's death in 2001.

**BOWER:** What about the Big Dig, the Central Artery Tunnel Project?

**WEINFURTER:** Huge issue. Huge, huge, huge issue. And we saw that coming for twenty years before they actually started work on it. It was a multi-agency approach then; it still is a multi-agency approach. Joe had to work very closely with the governor's offices, with especially Senator Kennedy's<sup>16</sup> office. We worked with all the engineers, the architects. It was just an enormous undertaking, especially for an office as small as Mr. Moakley's, to have to be engaged in so many campaigns for revenue and so many EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]-related issues. It was enormous and it strained us dramatically in terms of trying to handle all of that in-house. Luckily we had the Senator Kennedy office to drop on in that issue and their staffing situations were greatly better than ours. (laughs) But it was enormous.

**BOWER:** Do you know—my understanding of that project in its early planning stages was that there was a Dukakis<sup>17</sup> Central Artery underground piece and there was Governor King's<sup>18</sup> interest in the Third Harbor Tunnel, and the project itself ended up being both. Do you know if Congressman Moakley had a particular—?

**WEINFURTER:** He was always very supportive of the tunnel, and I think that he thought the tunnel would service South Boston well. I think he thought it would be a much more attractive approach to South Boston. I think that he thought it would escalate real estate values in South Boston, that it would escalate commercial involvement in what was then, the Fan Pier area, which was kind of a blighted area that you had to drive through on your way into Boston from South Boston, which of course now, is booming, booming, booming.

**BOWER:** So he was correct.

**WEINFURTER:** He was correct, he was absolutely correct. But I also can't underestimate how every elected official had his or her own plan for the Third Harbor Tunnel. And that was so

---

<sup>16</sup> Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy (1932- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate since 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Michael S. Dukakis (1933- ), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1962 to 1970, then as governor of Massachusetts from 1975 to 1979 and from 1983 to 1991.

divisive for so long because you couldn't get all these people to talk to each other, and it was incredibly difficult to do.

**BOWER:** Was that one of the roles that Congressman Moakley's office played?

**WEINFURTER:** Sure, sure, because he realized that most of the work for the Big Dig was being done in either his district, or Mr. O'Neill, or Joe Kennedy's<sup>19</sup>—or Mike Capuano's<sup>20</sup> district, and they were the two that were going to be the most impacted, so.

**BOWER:** Back in the early eighties was when Congressman Moakley got involved in the Salvadoran immigration issue. Were you involved with the Salvadoran—?

**WEINFURTER:** Sure. I remember—I actually remember the Monday morning after it happened. He was doing his town hall meetings which he just loved doing, and we did them every spring and every fall, and we'd send out postcards to all the neighborhoods in the city and to all the suburbs. And he would spend Saturdays in February, March, and April, then again in September, October, and November at post offices all throughout his district, sometimes two a day, sometimes three a day. And we'd go from eight in the morning until seven o'clock at night. And he would just set up shop at a table and a chair and constituents would come in and line up with suggestions with respect to policy, with requests for employment, for housing. Their needs ran the gamut of any big urban congressional district.

But one particular Monday morning after Joe came back from the district—he had been in Jamaica Plain at a post office visit and he had a group of religious activists come in with some Salvadoran refugees who pressed Joe on the refugee issue and what could be done to assist them in their efforts to stay in the United States to avoid political persecution in El Salvador. And something in the way that the religious members conveyed the stories of the refugees to Joe captured his heart and he never let it go until the day he died. And he determined that there might

---

<sup>18</sup> Edward J. King (1925-2006) was the governor of Massachusetts from 1979 to 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph P. Kennedy II (1952- ), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1987 to 1999.

be or must be some kind of prescription that he could come up with that would offer some kind of sanctuary to these people quickly.

And Jim McGovern<sup>21</sup> had just started working on our staff at that point—I think Jim joined our staff in '81 or '82, fresh out of American University—and Joe gave Jim the assignment of talking to justice [the Department of Justice] and talking to the judiciary committees on the House and Senate side to see if there was a mechanism that could be developed that could assist illegal El Salvadoran aliens in their efforts to stay in the United States to avoid the horrible fates in El Salvador. And that campaign took four years I think, or five years, but it paid rich dividends for the refugees around the country. We came up with an approach, an emergency voluntary departure status category that we worked with judiciary and we worked with the Department of Justice and INS [Immigration and Naturalization Services] on, and I think Joe saved a lot of lives.<sup>22</sup> And became a cult hero in the process.

**BOWER:** And so you were chief of staff when the Jesuit murders took place.<sup>23</sup>

**WEINFURTER:** I was.

**BOWER:** And I know that Congressman McGovern was kind of the El Salvador point person, but you were—

**WEINFURTER:** Primarily because Jim had worked on the El Salvadoran emergency voluntary

---

<sup>20</sup> Michael Capuano (1952- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts' Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1999.

<sup>21</sup> James P. McGovern (1959- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts' Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997. He was a member of Moakley's congressional staff from 1982 to 1996. OH-013 in the Moakley Oral History Project is an interview with Congressman McGovern

<sup>22</sup> 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>.)

<sup>23</sup> On November 16, 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were murdered at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

departure status legislation, he had great familiarity with some of the social and political organizations in El Salvador. So when the murder of the Jesuits occurred at the University of Central America, we were already, as an office, plugged into both the political structure in El Salvador, and many of us in the office, myself included, also come out of a Jesuit high school and a Jesuit college and had a background of eight years, ten years, twelve years of exposure to the Jesuits so we were incredibly comfortable with the issue.

And I think Speaker Foley, at that point, saw that Moakley was a natural vehicle to take a look at this and try to figure out if in fact there was any, as the speaker said, "unfortunate and untimely involvement of the United States government" in this issue.<sup>24</sup> And Jim McGovern was a hero in terms of doing all the leg work on this that Moakley encouraged him to do and produced a report<sup>25</sup> that was scathing and that indicted many at the highest levels of the U.S. government for their involvement in training people that ultimately became killing machines.

**BOWER:** Policy analysts say now that Congressman Moakley's work as chairman of the task force, in addition to some of the things that he did while he was in El Salvador for the commission, led directly to the peace process. Would you like to comment on that at all?

**WEINFURTER:** I think that there's nobody that could contradict that. You have to understand Joe, too—he was so happy to be in Boston. He almost never traveled. He had no interest in those European junkets and South American junkets, and he went to China once I think with Speaker O'Neill and as he always said, came back with hepatitis C. He just was not a traveling member. However, when it came to El Salvador, I bet he went a dozen times. And he went because he loved the people, and he loved the possibilities that he saw on the streets of El Salvador every day.

And I went with him several times as well, and let me tell you, it was scary. It was intimidating. You were in a country that was at civil war and you were thought to be an arm of the American

---

<sup>24</sup> 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.

leadership that most people in El Salvador detested, despite the fact that Joe didn't agree with that policy at all and in fact was an instigator for political change. I still think that we were vulnerable all the time, and I know that for a fact. And I know there were many times, especially when just Jim and Joe down there where they felt particularly vulnerable as they drove off into the jungles with guides that were certainly suspect. (laughter)

**BOWER:** Do you have any observations on how he managed the commission? I know that it was bipartisan; Congressman Dreier,<sup>26</sup> for instance, was on that committee. He's now the chairman of Rules Committee. Any observations?

**WEINFURTER:** It was a small group of Democrats and Republicans in the House that worked on the committee. I think that on a staff level, everybody got along exceedingly well. I think that the final report was unanimous; all five members or eight members signed the document. I think they thought that it was well-worded, that it was pointed, and that it contained recommendations that were practical and enactable. To this day, Dave Dreier is my next door neighbor. I talk to Dave Dreier all the time and he still says, despite the glories of his career as chairman of Rules Committee, as head of the Schwarzenegger campaign, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, he says that was one of the most productive and most satisfying things he ever did in his tenure. And Dave Dryer now has been in the House almost as long as Joe was in the House. He's, I think, at thirty years himself.

**BOWER:** Interesting, interesting. I think we talked about this a little bit, but how do you see Congress having changed since you started on the Hill?

**WEINFURTER:** Well, I hate to say this, but I think it's changed very negatively. And I think it's just not a pleasurable place to be these days. When I was on the Hill, one, as a member of Congress you came with a set of ideas and a set of hopes and a set of expectations and goals that you would work on in the course of your tenure on the Hill. You also, in the course of your

---

<sup>25</sup> On April 30, 1990, the Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador released its interim report on its investigation into the Jesuit murders. This report is available for research at the John Joseph Moakley Archive.

tenure on the Hill, built bridges—by definition you had to—to members on other committees, to members on the other side of the aisle, to other members' constituencies, in an effort to assist you in satisfying your goals for your district or your personal goals, whatever they might be. I just get the sense that that whole communication process and that whole sense of expectation has been lessened a lot in recent years. The House, especially, even more so than the Senate seems to be kind of a playing field of broken dreams these days. Members who are unhappy, staff who are unhappy, members who don't know each other, staff who feel constrained not to speak to staff on the other side of the aisle. These days, I've even heard stories that interns, congressional interns, college interns, when they come to Washington, are afraid to apply for a job in the Democratic office for fear that serving as a Democratic intern will impact negatively their job prospects.

It's a fearful place these days and that the specter of money is just constant, it just never stops. A member's own fundraising needs, the sense of required contribution put on that member, put on his own political party organizations, plural; his own national committee for the reelection of his majority in the House, presidential campaigns. It's just an unending, backbreaking area of responsibility. And I think that members don't have the sense of excitement, I don't think that they have the sense of completion that you get when you've done a job well, I don't think they have the relationships and the friendships that members had in the past. I think it's (inaudible). And I frankly don't know how you alter that anymore. I think that money is a cancer on the institution.

**BOWER:** You mentioned earlier the closeness of Speaker O'Neill, Mr. Conte, Mr. Boland, Mr. Murtha. Were those relationships—first let me ask, it seems that Speaker O'Neill saw something in Joe Moakley, even though he ran as an independent, that he would appoint him to these various positions. Can you comment at all on how Speaker O'Neill worked and how you saw that relationship?

**WEINFURTER:** Sure. I think that Joe and the Speaker were incredibly different guys, though.

---

<sup>26</sup> David Dreier (1952- ), a Republican, has represented California's Twenty-sixth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1981. He served as chairman of the House Rules Committee from 1999 to 2007.

So many people think they were like brothers, and that they had the identical backgrounds, et cetera, but they didn't. Joe was an incredibly private guy, despite his public persona. He had no children, he had a wonderful marriage but Evelyn was not exactly connected at the hip to him with respect to his career, she was in Boston, he was in Washington. Tip had a huge family, he had involvement from his family in his career, he had, I think, a much closer support network than Mr. Moakley did. Joe was kind of a lone gun, especially early on in his tenure in Congress. He was very much an independent operator, and had that reputation. But I think speaker O'Neill saw in him talent, I think he saw honesty, I think he saw a respect for the institution.

I think that Joe made it crystal clear from the first day he arrived in the House until the day he died that all he ever wanted to be was the congressman from the Ninth Congressional District. And I remember when he was dying, I went out there one day and he was on the phone, calling MDC [Metropolitan District Commission] commissioners trying to line up jobs for kids as lifeguards, a couple of days before he died. He never wanted to be anything else, ever. And I think that O'Neill was in the same case. I think that despite their differences of background, despite their differences in family structures and things like that, I think they both saw that service in the House of Representatives was noble and was a calling.

**BOWER:** So when you mention that what you see as one of the differences that members had vision when they came into office—in your mind, Joe Moakley had a vision of what he was looking to accomplish when he came—

**WEINFURTER:** Absolutely. Sure. And I think that you look at Boston now, and Boston now is dramatically different than it was in 1973. And I think Joe's hand can be felt in many of those changes that have occurred in Boston, from the historic preservation stuff, to the Big Dig, to the booming economy in the region, to technology development, to the enhanced circumstances that many state—private and state colleges and universities find themselves in, to home health care delivery to state transportation issues. I think that Joe's thirty years of service can be felt up there now on a daily basis. Good God, just driving through the district and seeing everything named after Joe all over the place is indicative of that.

**BOWER:** I read some place that he was once voted the most popular member of the House.

**WEINFURTER:** I don't remember seeing that, but I'm sure that that probably was the case.

**BOWER:** He was very available to everyone.

**WEINFURTER:** Even to this day I go over there—in my job here I spend a lot of time on the Hill, and I'm constantly running into waitresses from the House dining room, elevator operators, or a cop that's now a bigwig in some other agency within the House, and you know, they owe their careers to Joe and they stop me in the hallway all the time to tell me how much they miss him.

**BOWER:** Besides the archive, which has his papers, we also have an institute, which is dedicated to furthering his political leadership and public service legacy and one of the things we're interested in hearing from people is what you see as his legacy, both in Massachusetts and in Congress.

**WEINFURTER:** Public service is a noble profession, I think that's all—it should be on his tombstone. His service, I think, as a veteran, his service on the Boston City Council, his service as a state legislator, and his service in Congress. His only focus was elevating the life conditions of people in his state and in his municipality. I don't think he ever sought any personal enhancement. I don't think he—he lived in the same house that he lived in his entire career. He thought that working on behalf of people that elected him to the higher office was a calling from God and it was his vocation.

**BOWER:** Did you know Evelyn at all? Tell us about that.

**WEINFURTER:** Oh good God, did I. Maybe too well. (laughter) In terms of a staff person for Mr. Moakley, she was wonderful because she let you do your job. She was the antithesis of so often what a congressional spouse could be, be that spouse male or female. I think all of us have

friends that have worked in offices where the wife or the husband of the member was inordinately and unfortunately over-involved in the member's execution of his or her official duties and political duties. In Mr. Moakley's office that was absolutely not the case, Mrs. Moakley was completely uninterested in her husband's public career, but she did stand in the background and she did support Joe and what he did.

I sometimes think, and I think Joe thought, that she would have been much happier had he remained in the criminal profession of law, as a criminal attorney, and certainly their lifestyle would have been far more enhanced than it was as a member of Congress. But she knew that that's what he liked doing, she knew that being an elected member of Congress made him happy and she made her peace with that early on, even though she didn't live the lifestyle that she did when she was married to a prosperous Boston attorney. So she was quite a woman.

**BOWER:** What do you remember about Congressman Moakley personally? Is there any particular story?

**WEINFURTER:** Yeah, one of the things I remember all the time is—I'm single; I was single when I worked in Joe's office, so I would very often be in the office on Saturdays because I didn't have family responsibilities, things like that, to handle. Joe, when he was in Washington, was always in the office on Saturdays because he also didn't have a family in Washington. And he would very often be over in the Capitol and I'd be in the Cannon office but we'd go back and forth on the phones very often on Saturday morning just kind of dissecting the Boston papers and the Washington papers. One of my jobs was always to kind of oversee the congressional mail volume. And what we would do normally is I'd collect all the mail that would come in and I'd assign it to individual LA's [legislative assistants] and LC's [legislative correspondents] and then I'd proof it when it was returned to my desk and I'd stack it and I'd walk it over for a signature. And that, until Joe's dying day, that was one of the things he enjoyed the most, was signing outgoing mail, and he would proof and he had a great eye for address errors, zip code errors, punctuation errors, and he would circle things that he thought were not appropriate and they would be returned immediately to the L.A. that wrote them. (laughs)

But on Saturdays, very often, he would go through hundreds of pieces of correspondence and sign them, and he'd try to put notes, very often, on the bottom of correspondence going out to individuals. And that was fun too; you'd sit there with him on Saturdays as he went through the mail. It was a fun process. Saturdays were fun.

**BOWER:** I think you mentioned that early in your career, you wrote speeches for him?

**WEINFURTER:** Until I left, Jim and I shared that responsibility.

**BOWER:** And what was his involvement in that? Was that something that—?

**WEINFURTER:** Oh, yeah. Normally if you had a speech come across your desk or come through the invitation process you'd go in and talk to him about it first. Sometimes you knew more about the audience than he did, sometimes he knew more about the audience than you did, so you'd try to come to an understanding both of what the author's expectations and what Joe's expectations were in terms of who was going to be in the room and what the subject matter was, and then you'd just sound out themes with him in terms of what do you want to talk about, how do you want to handle this.

And then you'd go back to your desk and you'd start looking for sources, and you'd call people in the state, you'd call people in the Library of Congress, you'd call people on committees, and you'd try to get a pretty good understanding so that the speech wasn't just pabulum; Joe hated giving speeches that said nothing; he hated that. And you'd normally start off with some kind of legislative vehicle, talk about a bill or an issue and then take it a step beyond that and wrap it up. And he wasn't big on speeches that were more than ten minutes or fifteen minutes. Even commencement addresses, he was a pretty quick study.

**BOWER:** Was that a way for him to get feedback? Did people react after they heard these speeches?

**WEINFURTER:** Mm-hmm. And I think that he grew as his speech making increased. When I first started, he was not a great speech giver, and I don't think he was comfortable much, even as a trial lawyer. You would think that trial lawyers make their living with their ability to announce a client's needs in a court room. Joe I don't think had a lot of confidence in the beginning in his ability to convey his ideas to an audience. But I think that changed as it does for most members of Congress as they become more comfortable in their own skin. And there were lots of times where he had to give a speech on an issue that he might have known that much about, and we would work it and work it and work it and he would practice. And we'd practice sometimes before a mic and sometimes just standing up behind his desk and you'd have to throw in pause lines and breaks.

I remember one time we had to go to an Ocean Spray cranberry convention in Boca Raton, Florida. And it was all of these Massachusetts cranberry growers, hundreds of them, and Joe's topic was cranberry crop insurance. And I will never forget him as he walked up to the podium and looked at me and said, "How in the world did you ever get me into this? Me, giving a speech on cranberry crop insurance," which he knew not one single thing about. (laughs) But he gave a great speech, and it was fun. And it was all that the bog growers needed to hear.

**BOWER:** That's great. As chief of staff, can you tell us a little bit about how the office was organized and how you worked with the staff and how the Congressman worked with the staff?

**WEINFURTER:** Sure. It was really a pretty simple structure. It was, I'm sure, very much a structure that most offices have today. We had a chief of staff, we had a press secretary, we had a legislative director, we had a couple of LA's, we had a couple of LC's, and a couple of front desk people. In Washington, it was very, very easy.

In the district, we had a smaller staff; we had seven I think for the Boston office. We had a district director that served as district director for the entire time that I was there, and then case workers and a few other people that serviced the constituents' needs in the district office. And I think, unlike other offices, I think there was never any hostility or any competition between the District offices and the Washington offices. I think that we all backed each other up well and we

did it on a day-to-day basis, I think that Moakley was equally comfortable with the Boston staff or the Washington staff. I think the two staffs were able to exchange ideas and responsibilities and critique each other without any—there was no turf issue ever in the whole time I was there, not a single misunderstanding ever occurring, that I'm aware of, between anyone.

**BOWER:** Was Congressman Moakley hands on when working with the staff?

**WEINFURTER:** Very much, yeah.

**BOWER:** And he not only had an office suite in the Cannon Building, but he also had an office in the Capitol as well.

**WEINFURTER:** Right, right.

**BOWER:** Was that part of the Personnel Committee?

**WEINFURTER:** Well while he chaired the Personnel Committee, he also had an office in the Rayburn Building, in the basement of the Rayburn Building, which he didn't use that often. But the office in the Capitol Building came when he went to the Rules Committee and he did use that all the time. He lived there, in that office. He was very much often in the Cannon Building on weekends because the Canon Building, you could park in the garage right underneath our office suite. So we would just walk over the Capitol when we needed to see him.

The relationship between the Rules Committee staff and the Moakley personal office where Joe was chair was a little bit different than the relationship the Washington office had with the Boston office. I think the committee staff, we had a little bit more of a hands-off policy. They did the Rules Committee, we did the personal office. We spelled each other once in a while if there was an issue that might have crossed, but by and large, they did their stuff, we did our stuff. We worked together well, but there weren't very often lots of areas of overlapping responsibilities at all.

**BOWER:** Did he inherit a certain amount of staff on Rules?

**WEINFURTER:** On Rules? He sure did. I think he kept most of them. There's some that left of their own volition, but I think the ones that wanted to stay stayed.

**BOWER:** Do you have any observations on how—because he was on the Rules Committee and then chair, that kept him from having other committee assignments.

**WEINFURTER:** Right, it's an exclusive committee.

**BOWER:** So how did that fact of his membership change or differ from how other congressional offices might have worked?

**WEINFURTER:** Well I think it did dramatically. Most members of Congress have two or three committees on this that they have to divvy up their time on. Joe was the chairman on the Rules Committee, whereas a member of the Rules Committee had just that one committee because it's an exclusive committee, much as Appropriations or Ways and Means might be. So in some respect, it freed him up a bit from activities because he really only had one committee that he had to serve on. The Rules Committee would meet sporadically. They would often meet at odd times; they would very often meet late at night, sometimes they'd meet on Saturdays if it was an odd set of circumstances confronting the House. But during the day he had probably larger amounts of time available to deal with staff and constituent issues than some other members who would have to go from one committee hearing to the next committee hearing, to the next committee hearing, to the next committee hearing.

Plus, Rules Committee hearings, when Joe chaired, were briefer, I think, than they are now. I think Moakley ran a very tight ship over there and members were allotted a brief amount of time to speak on behalf of a bill, or in opposition of a bill or in support of or in opposition to a rule before that piece of legislation went to the floor. And I also got the sense that when Joe chaired the Rules Committee, the minority felt they had a role to play in the committee. The minority today in the Rules Committee feel they have absolutely no role to play; they're nothing. It's a

nothing place for a member to be right now.

**BOWER:** How would you characterize the volume of legislation that was generated out of your office? From an archivist point of view, not knowing much about it, it seems like there was a lot of legislation that Congressman Moakley was involved in either as a sponsor—

**WEINFURTER:** Well, I think some of that is just Joe's background. One, he is kind of a generalist. He came to Congress as a trial lawyer, not as a transportation expert or a doctor or a healthcare provider. He came as just a resident of a large city with a very complex constituency. So I think his focus during his time in the Congress was universal, and I think that he was involved in many, many, many different issues because they touched his constituencies in different ways. Plus his committee assignment as chairman of the Rules Committee was a generalist committee; he had to impact every single issue the Congress dealt with. So the impact of that was that he was interested in lots and lots of different things, and well-read on lots of different things, and he had people that he talked to regularly in those communities, in those issue areas that were the best sources for information in those issues. So he would prompt his staff to do a lot because he had the ear of so many people that knew what needed to be done and they would press him on being a conduit to getting things accomplished, and he liked that. He was a problem solver. Everything was sort of case work to Joe, wouldn't you agree?

**BOWER:** Yes. Well, I think I've come to the end of the questions I have, I don't know whether or not you want to add anything else, any personal story you wanted to tell about Joe or any—

**WEINFURTER:** I would just say that from the day I walked into the office until the day I left, it was an honor. There was not a single day that I didn't get up that I didn't enjoy doing the job that I did in that office. Working for Joe was the experience of a lifetime, and I think that you would get that sentiment from every single person. Every veteran Moakley staff person that you've spoken with I'm sure would say the exact same thing, that you saw in that guy everything that you wanted to be, and I think that lots of people can't say that about their bosses.

**BOWER:** Thank you John.

**WEINFURTER:** Sure.

**END OF INTERVIEW**