Interview with Bob Michel and Tom Foley
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Interviewer: Ron Sarasin

Ron Sarasin: Gentlemen, it is really a pleasure to have both of you here in the same place to be able to talk about your experiences in Congress: Bob Michel your experience since 1957 and Tom Foley your experience since 1965—a long time being in the Congress. Bob, since you arrived there first, let me ask you what your impression was the first day you walked on the House floor. Let me back up I guess a little bit to say that I don't think either of you gentlemen had any statehouse experience before, but you had both been staffers and both been chiefs of staff for your respective Members and so you certainly were familiar with the routine and the rules and everything else; these things didn't come as a surprise. Still you shifted from staff to a Member of Congress. Bob Michel what was your first thought.

Bob Michel: Well of course you're right, being here as an assistant earlier you knew pretty much a number of the people there and the procedures, so it wasn't brand spanking new like it is for someone who sees the floor of the House for the first time. But, there's something special when you're elected yourself and down there in the well of the House taking the oath of office and thinking "My gosh here I am Bobby Michel from Peoria getting sworn in as a member of the Congress of the United States at 33 years of age and look what you've got ahead of you." It was a momentous moment, there's no question about it. Of course, serving 38 years, but the real distinction my dear friend Tom Foley and me, I spent all my years in the minority, 38 years, and never chaired anything, eventually except for the time the goodness of the Speaker on the last day I was in the Congress and he yielded the gavel to me and I think the House gave us a big round of applause that I finally made it to the top for a few moments.

Sarasin: Tom, Tom Foley, what was your experience on that first day?

Tom Foley: I wasn't chief of staff, as Bob was; I was a special counsel on the Senate Interior Committee. I came back to Washington D.C in 1963 to work for Scoop Jackson, 1961 actually, to work for Scoop Jackson and then served on the Interior Committee of the Senate where he was next in line to the chairmanship. Anyway, he talked to me from time to time about the possibility of running for Congress. I was single and enjoying Washington and didn't pay much attention to it. But, anyway, I was out in the state and I—through a series of events—I filed at the last minute for Congress in 1964 and won the election. So, I came back to Washington, as Bob did, as somebody who had always been there at least for a few years, going over to the House as a Member was an entirely different thing and I remember both parties were to have orientation programs for Members when they arrived. Republicans would be briefed by the Republican leader and the Democratic Members would be briefed by the Speaker, then John McCormack. He greeted our group, which was a pretty large one by saying, "You know, I don't think any of us here will take you too seriously unless you get reelected. People get elected by accident. You may be one of the accidental ones. But, in two years time if you're still here then we'll take you with some seriousness." Well that was kind of a dash of cold water. But the impression is still tremendous when you raise your hand and take the oath of office. I think that was an emotional thing for me, all during the time I served in Congress, including the time when I was Speaker and had the privilege of administering the oath to other members. It's a post-Civil War oath and it asks the Members to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic; and to bear true faith and allegiance the same. And that you take this oath without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion and that you will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office of which you are about to enter, so help you God. I still get a little emotional when I think about it. And then the Speaker would say, "You are now Members of Congress. Welcome to the House of Representatives." I don't think I ever went through a ceremony, either receiving the oath or giving it,

where I didn't feel it was an enormous privilege to represent 500,000 or 600,000 of your constituents.

Michel: It should be said, I think, that before the Speaker administers the oath to all those who are bona-fidely elected from their districts, he was given the oath by the senior Member of the House of Representatives. That's the way the proceedings began when you started a Congress. In these last few times, of course, it's been Mr. John Dingell from Michigan who's succeeded his father and has served down here now for, boy I forget how many years it's been, but he's going to be setting a record, I think by the time he completes his tenure.

Sarasin: It ought to be close to 50 if not there yet. [Editor's note: John D. Dingell (D-MI) entered Congress in December 1955].

Foley: We take almost all of our parliamentary institutions from the British House of Commons because when we became a country in 1789, and earlier under the Articles, the Speaker was a reflection of the British Speaker. When I was elected Speaker, which was the second greatest honor after being elected a Member. I had a visit from Bernard Weatherall, who was then the Speaker of the House of Commons in London and he asked me what number speaker I was. And I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm the 49th, and he said he was the 302nd. And I said, "Well, sir, that's what we call in the United States a put-down." And he said, "Well, you know, by various accounts we started in 1258 or in 1376 and several of us were beheaded. Particularly when the king was in a bad mood." For a long time in the British history, the Speaker was thought to be really an officer of the crown. As the office evolved, in 1642, when King Charles I entered the House of Commons to search for and arrest five members for high treason, the King asked him whether he knew the location of the members. The Speaker William Lenthall famously replied, "May it please your majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here." So the idea developed that the Speaker was, in Britain, not only the first commoner but

represented the House not the crown. Today, that's embodied in our tradition. The Constitution says the Speaker in the House shall choose "c-h-u-s-e" its Speaker and other officers. But there's no time like your first term, your first election and your first oath of office in the House. You may repeat it many times but that's a tremendous moment.

Michel: Well then Mr. Speaker, you mentioned the word *put-down* and I'm reminded of that great story you tell. When you were first coming to the Congress and I guess I forget who it was the chairman of the Congressional Campaign Committee who had the greatest of advice for you as a junior member and then, of course, you went up through the ranks of all the positions. And then found out he was right. Give 'em a little bit of that.

Foley: Well, that was the same meeting, the first meeting, where the Speaker, McCormack, said that if we come back in two years he'll pay attention to us. The only other person who spoke was the senior member from Ohio, Mike Kirwan, who was the absolute power in public works. You couldn't get a sidewalk built in the United States with federal money except that it went through his committee with his blessing. He was a rather rascal gentleman and he said he wanted to give some advice to the new Members. He said, "To avoid the most single devastatingly bad thing you can do here." We thought this was some kind of ethical violation. And he leaned forward and said "You know what that is? That great mistake is thinking for yourselves. No don't do that please. You know, listen to the subcommittee chairman, listen to the committee chairman, follow the chairman of the Democratic caucus, obey the wishes of the majority leader, and especially, pray God, support, follow, and revere the Speaker." I remember being personally outraged. I couldn't say anything because in those days you couldn't speak up. But I thought: this is outrageous; I mean I didn't come back here to Washington to take dictation from some senior Pooh-Bah in the Democratic Party. I'm gonna vote the way my constituents want me to vote and the way I think is right. I made the speech to myself, not out loud. But he went on to say, "You know, it's so bad, it's worse

than stealing money, and don't ever steal money, don't ever be dishonest, but even worse than that is thinking for yourself." Anyway, I couldn't believe it and it bothered me for so long. Of course, Members used their own judgment, fortunately, but when I had the great honor, in 1989, to take the oath of office as Speaker, administered by the senior member of the House, the wise words of Mr. Kirwan came across a generation of time. I thought: well maybe at least some people will follow, revere and support the Speaker. There is a distinction in the Congress today between those issues on which members are expected particularly in the House to follow their party leadership. That usually involves things like procedural votes, motions that bring legislation to the floor, support for the rules, and the most binding vote of all, the only one that really is a binding vote is when at the beginning of the session you vote for Speaker. That vote defines whether you are a Democrat or Republican—nothing wrong with voting for either candidate. Republicans put up Bob Michel or at the time I think it was John Rhodes and the Democrats put up John McCormack and if you were a Republican you call out when they elect the Speaker, "Rhodes," and if you were a Democrat you would call out "McCormack." We had a number of, when Bob was majority leader…

Michel: Minority leader.

Foley: …minority leader, should have been majority leader, if there was going to be a change in Speaker. But, anyway, he told me he couldn't vote for Tip O'Neill. I come from part of the country where Tip is not very popular and he supports issues I don't particularly support. I'm a conservative from the South and I'm going to vote for Bob Michel. And I said, you can do that, you're free to do that but let me give you some advice. If I were you, I'd go over and see Billy Pitts and ask if he can make an appointment with Bob so that you can arrange to become a Republican. And Bob can give you some possible means of getting on a committee as a Republican. He said, "I'm not gonna become a Republican." And I said, "Well, you're gonna become a Republican or a foundling because the moment you vote against Tip O'Neill you

will be out of the Democratic caucus and you will no longer be a Democrat. And that's the same today if Speaker Hastert, when he is elected, Members of Congress shout out Hastert or Pelosi. If a Republican member voted for Pelosi, he wouldn't be a Republican member and vice versa. So that's the only thing voting for that and voting for the rules that is an iron clad party line vote.

Michel: I think the gentleman back in those days was Al Watson from South Carolina.

Foley: There were a couple of people who had supported Presidential Candidate Barry Goldwater. They had openly endorsed him, they didn't violate the rule of voting for the wrong name for Speaker, but they did lend their names and were openly involved in the campaign for Barry Goldwater. By the way, somebody I came to admire a while later in my Congressional career. It was considered treasonous, so they were promptly bounced back out of the Democratic caucus. The other one was a Member of Congress from Mississippi, the Member of Congress from South Carolina went back home and got re-elected as a Republican in a special election. The Member from Mississippi became the governor of Mississippi—Republican governor of Mississippi. So, you know, these party lines have always existed. I tend to think that the big difference today is that unfortunately, for a lot of reasons on both sides of the aisle, there has been a rather irritable relationship between the parties. Not that we didn't have tough debates and very serious disagreements on fundamental positions on policy that were different, but it wasn't with a personal animosity that very often one sees today in the Congress. I think that's the result of a number of factors. One of them is that Members increasingly don't stay in Washington, they live at home, they fly in town on Tuesday morning and leave on Thursday afternoon. And as a result of that, they don't really get to know the Members on the other side of the aisle and they don't develop friendships or associations or acquaintances, whatever you want to call it that allows them to understand and respect other people across the aisle. My wife Heather and I felt

very close to Bob and to Corinne (Mrs. Michel) and we were talking from time to time about taking an opportunity to do a little traveling together, privately, or as part of a delegation, but that doesn't happen much anymore. There are two Members of Congress now who have just gotten an award from the Aspen Society for having started a center aisle effort to bring Members of Congress together and to have a way of getting to know each other.

Michel: Well, it's good that you opened up the subject, Mr. Speaker, because things have changed considerably from the time you and I were leaders of our respective parties and even though we'd get involved in very vigorous debates on key issues, we never let it degenerate to a fight between personalities. Usually the Speaker gets the last call and as the Minority Leader, I would get the last call on my side. I'd make the windup argument as best I could knowing full well my friend Tom Foley is going to take the other side and will listen very attentively and respectfully and vote our conscience, obviously. But the thing that I enjoyed so much during my tenure as Minority Leader as even with Speaker Tip O'Neill we had a great respect for one another personally. We could go at it hammer and tongs verbally during the course of the day and after it was all over go back to the office and play a little gin rummy and have a brew or something. Or even play golf on weekends. And with Tom Foley, well then it became a situation where Tom came to me and said, "Bob, you know when we have these leadership office meetings, why don't we alternate offices? We'll have one in my office and the next week, we'll have one in your office." Well when you have that kind of a relationship it begins at the top and I think that's what's very necessary in order to filter down to the Members so they take a lead from their leaders. Well if they are getting together and talking socially and being civil to one another maybe we ought to. Your mention of those new Members who formed this kind of middle aisle caucus—both the Speaker and I were invited to their opening press conference and then subsequently when they had about 35 members they asked us back for a breakfast and wanted to tell us how they are getting along and free to ask

us any questions on how they could enlarge this membership. That's really what it takes. It's too bad that the Members today are not enjoying the relationships that we had back in those earlier days cause that made it so much more interesting and pleasurable, quite frankly to be a Member. Your mentioning of the T&T club [a reference to Members who wanted to serve from Tuesday through Thursday] when you and I were junior members and we used to criticize the T&T members and those were those members who were largely lawyers from New York and Philadelphia and their business was lawyering in their districts. It was an avocation to come serve in Congress and we kind of decried those folks back in those days. Of course, Tom here, from the state of Washington, was not that easy getting back and forth to his state and me from Illinois, different. Incidentally, when I first came to Congress they only reimbursed a Member for one trip back and forth to their district. Then it became 3. Then it became 6. And now, of course, it's unlimited. That also has a bearing upon the times Members associate with one another here in Washington. And then when we got to electronic voting, I think, has something to do with the fact that we weren't here for teller votes like we used to have to be on the floor to really vote personally on down the aisle on amendments. There are a number of the things that contribute to what's happened today versus the life we enjoyed, Tom.

Sarasin: How much of the change in Congress, the increased partisanship that exists today might be attributed to the fact that the caucuses seem to be more homogenous than they used to be—that you don't have the Northern liberals and Southern conservatives in the Democratic Party, and you don't have that spread of liberal and conservative in the Republican caucus.

Foley: Well, I think it's a contributing factor. There's no one thing, it's the fact that the lifestyle of Members has changed, they are coming into Washington not just from a few surrounding states, but from all over the country. Members have their families at home. They come to Washington and have a small basement apartment sometimes or they otherwise stay here for a couple of

days and then they go home again. And so the opportunity to get to know their colleagues is very difficult compared to what it once was. For example, in the days when Bob and I were serving, Members would often have activities, Bob mentioned playing golf, or they'd have children that were involved in soccer or in, now it is soccer, back then it was more likely to be swimming or something. And they shared experiences, they went to social things together and they got to know each other. The big problem now is that we have two largely anonymous groups of Members who come in and leave and the parties have been strengthened by the state legislatures, so that both Democratic and Republican districts are very much more geared to the incumbent Members who are serving and that makes it very unlikely that things will change in an election, another whole problem that we have with Congress. Neither Bob nor I wanted to see, you know, huge turnover every two years but if there's not a real opportunity for change then that leads to periods of time, I think, frankly, that the Democrats were in power in the House too long. Bob Michel was there for over 40 years and was never actually in the majority.

Michel: And the highest number I had of Republican members was 192. Of course then if we won something by my being able to cajole some on your side to join us thoughtful people, why we'd win one during those Reagan years.

Foley: There's nothing wrong with, by the way, the House having an agenda which is pushed through. The House is the body where the Rules Committee, the Speaker, and the Majority Leadership have a right to advance the program of the majority. That's not the question, the question is how it is done and whether there are opportunities for the minority to participate in debate to give additional insight and thoughts to the legislation; to contribute to the legislation as it's formed in the House. When I was Speaker, we sinned, we made some mistakes, but I think it's advanced another mile or so, so that things that would have been, I think, unthinkable at the time that Bob and I were in Congress are fairly routine: Conference committee meeting first

with the majority reaching decisions and inviting the minority in and taking the vote, that sort of thing. So there probably needs to be some reconsideration of how the House is conducted. It's a different body than the Senate. The genius of the Founders was to have in the House of Representatives, a so-called people's body, elected every two years and responsive to local constituencies and concerns and the Senate representing the states. Over our history it's worked pretty well, I think, but it constantly needs to be refreshed and re-examined. There is a danger; I think particularity in a time of war, where the House and the Senate together can be subordinated to executive power. We have a history of the Civil War, World War I, World War II, where power flows to the executive branch. It's still important for the Congress to do oversight and to provide its role of a check on the executive and judicial power.

Sarasin: You mention war, Tom, the debate that I remember, this was long after I had served in the Congress, but happened to pay attention to it on C-SPAN, was the resolution for the first Gulf War that I found as an observer to be absolutely riveting. I thought it was the time the House was at its best. And you were both involved in that?

Michel: Well, yes, and as a matter of fact when people ask me, " Bob, what were some of the most telling moments that you remember as being significant," I would refer to that debate that we had, a bipartisan debate. President Bush, the first President Bush, asked for authority to use ground troops. The thing was already underway, but he felt he needed real authority from the Congress to do it up right. So, Mr. Solarz [Stephen Solarz] from New York, Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee and I cosponsored a resolution to do that. Then we had a spirited debate on that particular issue. Of course, Tom and I knew we would be in our traditional positions, where I would be for it, being the sponsor of the legislation and that Tom and some of his colleagues thought that more time was needed to discuss the—or to see what unfolded before actually committing ourselves. That was the crux of the argument—of course, for me being an old

combat infantryman during World War II and I was in the enlisted ranks all the time. I never had anything to say about where I was going or what I was doing—you're always following orders. I had to go up to Tom, who was presiding, as the Speaker that day in the chair, and tell him that, boy, this is a very emotional moment for me because now I'm in a position after these years of sending another generation in harm's way. I'm partially responsibly for calling the shot when a generation before I had nothing to say about what happened to me as a little combat infantryman. It was a real emotional moment, but you're right, Mr. Sarasin, that was the House, in I think its finest hour. We had a clean cut debate upon it and then let the chips fall where they may.

Foley: It's one of the cases and there is a somewhat different theory today sometimes we had situations when I was Speaker where a majority of the Democratic Party was against a certain course of action, but where it wouldn't pass without allowing a portion of the majority to vote with the minority to make it happen. That was the case with the first Gulf resolution. If you took a vote in the Democratic caucus, the majority would have been against the resolution, at that time. They wanted more time as Bob said. But it came to the floor, at the request of President Bush, 41 as we call the President Herbert Walker Bush. And it came interestingly enough after the election and Members had just been re-elected. So there was no political pressure, in the sense of an immediate election ensuing, and the debate—I don't know how many hours but it was a long debate. It was watched very carefully in the country and I think people throughout the country responded to the debate as an extraordinary example of the House doing really what its supposed to do: To having a difference of opinion, to debating it civilly and responsibly and coming to a vote. Anyway, the moment that Bob mentioned when he came up to the chair and I was sitting in the chair. Bob always wore very proudly a replica of the combat infantryman's badge. In addition to being one of the recipients of the Medal of Honor, which is the highest award that the United States gives to a civilian. He was a proud former combat infantryman and exactly as he said, he was really kind of choked up when he said

that, you know, this is a hard vote for me, maybe the hardest I've ever cast because of sending young men and women into, we didn't know what the result would be, it was an unbelievably short and effective campaign, but for all anybody knew it could have gone on for a long, long time with many, many, many more casualties. So, from that standpoint my admiration for Bob, if it was possible, took another couple of decibels up as somebody who was conscious of what he was doing from his own experience knew that this was a momentous decision and that we were all playing a part in what might mean for a lot of young Americans, either death or disability or whatever. And it's one of those things—that vote—that I recall most vividly almost in all the time that I was in the Congress.

Sarasin: You say it was watched carefully by the American public, I know I wasn't the only one who was riveted that day. And you're right, it went on for hours and I couldn't tear myself away from the TV set watching it because it was just, I thought, boy, this is the best debate, the best experience I've ever watched the House go through. But there have to have been others, what other ones to you think of where the House really rose to the occasion?

Foley: Well, when I was in Congress there were a number of votes that were early on. I was elected to Congress just after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. Bob was present as a Member then, but in the early sixties we passed the Voting Rights Act, we passed acts that established programs for Medicare, we enacted legislation that protects the environment and a whole host of bills and acts that I think are part of the basic law of the United States today. Once in awhile, you have a feeling that you are living through a historic moment and I remember one time when Carl Albert was Speaker and a Republican Member from my state said, "Spiro Agnew, the Vice President, is in the Speaker's office offering to resign the Vice Presidency." And I thought to myself, this is a historic moment, there has never been a resignation of a Vice President before. So I suddenly realized that you're not just serving as a Member of Congress, but you're part

of a process, a stream of history, which takes you back to the earliest days of the Republic, when a whole series of changes and developments that makes the country what it is today. Those are sobering moments—the impeachment procedures against President Nixon. I stoutly refused, as a Member, to say how I was going to vote on the impeachment resolution. Maybe overly lawyerly like, I decided, well, this is an issue that is going to come to the House and I have to hear the evidence, I can't prejudge this thing, that's wrong. It's like convicting—of course impeachment is not conviction, the trial is in the Senate and it didn't come to that because the President resigned. But, you know, this is prejudging an issue before the jury, before the prosecutor has filed an indictment, and so I kept that up until the last minute. I voted, one of the toughest votes, in terms of my political life, was I voted to seat Adam Clayton Powell. Adam Clayton Powell was a Member from New York, and in some quarters somewhat of a disreputable member, very, very brilliant, bright, quick as could be, chairman of the Education and Labor Committee in the House. He was accused of various violations of the rules and an effort was made not to seat him. Now the Constitution provides that if two-thirds of the House votes, it can expel a Member and the House's judgment on that is without review, it's absolute, and you don't have to have a reason or a trial, the protection is that two-thirds of the members have to vote, which almost always means its bipartisan. Well, anyway, I decided that to exclude him from membership by a majority vote was not constitutional. We had to seat him; he had a valid election certificate from New York. The next day we could turn around with a two-thirds vote and expel him if the House wished to do that. Anyway, I voted against the resolution not to seat him and my district in eastern Washington exploded. I felt I had to go home and explain this. I was being denounced, you know, as supportive of a Member whose ethical conduct was alleged to be totally unfit, and people were writing letters to the papers, what in the world is he thinking about, what is he doing back there voting to seat Adam Clayton Powell. Well, I patiently tried to explain the constitutional provision and I had some difficulty doing it, in the heat of the moment. And then I was very, very grateful

to a Republican lawyer in Spokane, who was a member of a very prominent law firm, who wrote a letter to the newspaper, which the newspaper put it in a very prominent place and it said I had, like many people in this district, felt absolutely disgusted with Tom Foley's vote to seat Clayton Powell. Anyway, I reviewed his constitutional arguments and I decided he was absolutely correct and that he was following his oath of office to obey the Constitution and I intend to offer a resolution in the Spokane Bar Association—and it suddenly stopped the debate. And a year later, in Powell versus McCormack, the Supreme Court came to the conclusion and ruled, as we have said, that you have to have a two-thirds vote. Well, that was a narrow miss for me because I was about to be ridden out of town on the rail, except the honor of it.

Michel: Well, Mr. Speaker, you mentioned earlier, what took place during the course of Vice President Agnew's resigning and opening up a whole new set of things we would have to deal with. When we ultimately then chose our former leader on our side, Jerry Ford to become the new Vice President, because we were without a Vice President, and we needed one and, boy, when things unfolded with respect to President Nixon himself, why then we had someone to fall back on, and that was our former leader in the House, Jerry Ford. Boy, that was a very momentous day.

Foley: I'll tell you another high emotion point for me Bob. You may remember that when Jerry Ford, with whom we had served with, and in those days you got to know Members, as we've talked about, we were in the—I was in the Democratic cloakroom when we were watching on television the oath of office be administered to President Ford. There wasn't any Republican within 50 yards, 60 yards or whatever, we were all alone and President Ford in part of his address, after he was sworn in, asked the country to pray for him. There was an absolute dead silence in the Democratic cloakroom, you could hear a pin drop, and a single voice from the back of the cloakroom said, we will Jerry, God bless you. I'm not sure that could happen today, in

the same way, because there was this sense that Jerry Ford was from the House of Representatives, he was becoming the President of the United States, somebody with whom we had served, for whom we had respect and it was, again, one of those high emotional moments, that I think everybody who was in that cloakroom that day will remember.

Michel: Oh, I can fully appreciate that Tom because Corinne and I were fortunate enough to be there in the East Room witnessing that swearing in of President Ford and when he made that off-repeated quote, "Our long nightmare of Watergate is over." Of course, ultimately, he probably lost his election against Jimmy Carter because he pardoned President Nixon. Of course, there were other factors involved.

Foley: I think in *Profiles in Courage*, when the new one is written, this will be considered one of the acts of great political courage and great service to the country when Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon. He brought an era of confusion and anguish in our constitutional system to an end and I think he was right to do it. But, he may at least partially if not wholly paid for it with his office. That's the highest kind of calling, I think, for any public official. If he or she is willing to do what they think and believe deeply is the best thing for the country and put aside their own personal political future. It's not often that it happens because there are few issues where Members really feel so intensely about it that they are willing to lay the office on the line. I think that's one, what he did.

Michel: I think one of my most treasured exchanges of correspondences with Presidents, for me, was post-Nixon resignation. I was there that night in the Cabinet Room when he, just before he made his broadcast. There were as many Democrats as Republicans, Southern ones, of course at that time, Eastland [Sen. James O. Eastland (MS) and Dick Ichord [Rep. Richard Ichord (MO)], Tiger Teague [Olin E. Teague (TX)], Members like that, you know. I had—there was no press coverage of that—and I had presence of mind to pull out an

envelope from my pocket and just write a few notes so that the next day I could maybe flush them out. I called it a roomful of tears and it was very, very emotional kind of meeting and then, of course, ultimately I got back in touch with President Nixon and asked him to come back to the Republican caucus to speak. He had a great gift for, he always kept himself well informed of foreign affairs. I'd have to say that with all his faults and problems, you know, that he was a very gifted individual. And, very lawyerly like you Tom in his organization—intro, body, conclusion, 1, A, 2, you know. Those exchanges of handwritten letters, now back in the old Dirksen Leadership Center, are very telling. He conceded that my account of that evening, to his recollection, was pretty much on target.

Foley: I had the unusual privilege of having a very private dinner with President Nixon after he had left office. I friend of mine, Don Kendall, who was then the CEO of Pepsi-Co had been a close friend of the President's and asked me if I would be interested in having dinner with the him. I was then Speaker, it was in 1991, and I said surely. Anyway, we went to his home in New Jersey. He had given up the Secret Service and was living with his wife Pat in a very handsome townhouse, one of these gated communities. And anyway, we went to the house and went up to the top floor which had a large library, single room, very beautiful room. We had a glass of wine before dinner. The former President wasn't drinking anything, but he poured the wine for Don and for me. Then autographed the bottle, half empty bottle, and gave it to me. Unfortunately, our housekeeper threw it out, two days later, thinking it was partially used wine. We went down to the second floor where the dining room was and Mrs. Nixon had had a slight stroke and she was not at dinner, she was recovering. The only point of this story is that I agree with Bob, President Nixon always had a unique grasp of foreign policy—one of the most knowledgeable of all American Presidents, in recent years, on foreign policy issues. What amazed me was how closely he was following the domestic affairs. We have a redistricting every ten years, and I was treated that afternoon to a three-hour briefing by the person who knows more about

congressional districting, then and now, than any other single person, who went over every single one of the 435 Congressional districts until I was ready to surrender. When the subject of redistricting came up at dinner, I was flabbergasted, I was absolutely amazed. I thought former President Nixon had been at the briefing. I have a pretty good short-term memory, I forget things after awhile but right after an event I can recall things pretty well. And he was dead right, at least according to the expert that was briefing me on dozens and dozens and dozens of close races in the country. So, he obviously followed it very, very carefully. I think, in terms of his own mental abilities, he was one of the brightest Presidents in modern times, particularity as you say in foreign policy areas and such things as the opening of China and so on were historic actions which were taken in his administration. He also advanced a series of important social programs which people don't pay too much attention to today, or they exist, they're very important, but they don't pay attention to the fact that they were started in the Nixon Administration.

Sarasin: With all of the changes and the drama that occurred during that Watergate period, what's your thought about the fact that the Founders actually devised a pretty good system? We had an orderly transfer of power, with all of that drama, the army didn't take to the streets, the tanks didn't roll, and people expected it to be orderly and it was and life went on.

Foley: You know Ron, I think that's one of the most important things about our system. Bob and I had an opportunity to attend inaugurations of Presidents. When I was Speaker, I actually, I had the responsibility of riding to the Capitol with President Bush, 41, and with President-elect Bill Clinton. It was not a particularity warm conversation at the time, there was a lot of silence in the limousine. But, I thought to myself, and I said to former President to-be and the President to-be that, you know, its an amazing thing we're lining the streets today with troops in a celebratory ride honoring the change of power for the most powerful political office in the world from one to another and from one party to another, that is a remarkable thing; in the history of many

countries, it happens in parliamentary democracies, but for a country as powerful as ours to have this peaceful transition where the only troops in the field are there to parade and the only bands are there to play and to celebrate, is a pretty important thing. I think Americans should, in our differences about things, remember that the Founding Fathers really did establish a pretty good system and one that has endured a long time. Benjamin Franklin's comment about what have we done, we have created a Republic if you can keep it and we've kept it.

Sarasin: Bob Michel, Tom Foley we want to thank you very, very much for an amazing morning, a lot of interesting discussion. I hope we can pull you guys together and reminisce a little bit more at a future date.

Michel: Well it was sure enjoyable for me to participate always with my good friend Tom Foley because he's so good with his historical references to his tenure and others and of course, both of us serve happily on the Capitol Historical Society's Board trying to perpetuate the people's knowledge of what our government is all about and how it's evolved. There are all these changes and again how the Founding Fathers could have conceived that there would be some changes and they provided for it to be done in a very orderly fashion. It's been an enjoyable; we'll have to do it again sometime Tom when we both have another hour.

Foley: It's always a great pleasure Bob. Pleasure to be with you.