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ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the life of Democratic Congressman "Tip" O'Neill, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977-1986. O'Neill's life is recounted, including: (1) encountering the patronage practice in Boston politics; (2) experiences in the Massachusetts legislature; (3) work with the Kennedy brothers and Lyndon Johnson; (4) his views on various political leaders and events during his tenure in office; and (5) his work after retirement. Contains 61 references. (EH)

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**Political Education and Influence of Congressman Thomas Philip (Tip) O'Neill, Jr. (1912-94),
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives (1977-86)**

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Tip O'Neill grew up in a politically active Irish working family in North Cambridge, Massachusetts, physically near but culturally far from elite Yankee-oriented Harvard College. Growing up Irish shaped O'Neill's political education more than did the schools he attended: Gaelic school, parochial St. John's Grammar and High School, and Jesuit-run Boston College.

On a summer job cutting Harvard lawns in June 1927, 14-year-old O'Neill watched white-linen-suited Harvard graduates under outdoor commencement tents laughing, joking, and illegally drinking champagne [prohibition was in effect]. O'Neill recalled the incident sixty years later:

As I watched those privileged, confident Ivy League Yankees who had everything handed to them in life, I made a resolution that someday I would make sure my own people could go to places like Harvard [for] the same opportunities that these young college men took for granted." (O'Neill and Novak 1978)

This experience helped set O'Neill on a political career, winning eight elections to the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1936-52), becoming its minority leader (1947-48) one year and speaker the last four years (1948-52). He then won 17 elections to the U.S. House of Representatives (1952-86, 34 years), winning John F. Kennedy's House seat when Kennedy became U.S. Senator in 1952. He was Democratic House Whip (1971-73), Majority Leader, (1973-76), and Speaker (1977-86). As Speaker the last 10 years, he presided over the House; formed its committees and named their members; shaped and passed important legislation. He stood third in line from the U.S. presidency, after the president and vice president. His 1987 book, *Speaker of the House*, details the tumultuous half-century of his political career (1930s-80s) and pulls no punches describing U.S. political figures and events.

Tip O'Neill's grandfather, a refugee from the 1840s Irish potato famine, left County Cork, 1845, for Boston. He became a bricklayer in North Cambridge, where Tip's father, Thomas Philip O'Neill, Sr., was born, also a bricklayer and local politician who in 1900 was elected to the Cambridge City Council.

The Irish were united by poverty, Roman Catholicism, and enmity toward oppressive absentee English landlords. In Boston they opposed wealthy English Mayflower descendants living in fine homes with sons in elite schools like Groton and Harvard. The well-known jingle comparing working class Irish with English Mayflower descendants goes: "In good old Boston town/Home of the bean and the cod/The Lowells talk only to the Cabots/And the Cabots talk only to God."

Irish warmth, friendliness, a gift of gab, charisma, and storytelling ability led Tip O'Neill from boyhood toward a political career. Job notices which read NINA (no Irish need apply) also determined O'Neill to help his own working class neighbors, especially the needy, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or color.

In turn, the Irish, French Canadians, Italians, and Jews dug the clay that made the bricks that built the fine homes of the rich Yankee English in and around Boston and that enlarged Harvard's vine-covered buildings. In this urban ghetto setting, politicians, young and old, rang doorbells to get out the Irish vote for candidates Irish ward bosses knew would give patronage jobs to help the needy.

Thomas Philip O'Neill, Jr. (called Tom at home and later "Tip" by others) was born December 9, 1912, a cold winter day, while his father carried a protest sign on a freezing picket line outside Harvard College. Harvard had hired scabs to break a bricklayer union strike for better wages and working conditions. The O'Neills and their working class neighbors proudly wore the union label.

Tip O'Neill's mother, Rose A. (Tolan) O'Neill, died of tuberculosis when he was nine months old. A nun watched over him so that his father, brother, and sister could attend the funeral. For six years a French Canadian housekeeper raised him. He grew up with a French accent. His father remarried. His stepmother was good to him. Knowing he had no mother, the parish priest and parochial school nuns kept an eye on him. The nickname Tip came from Edward "Tip" O'Neill, St. Louis Brown's baseball player of the 1880s, whose skill at hitting tip fouls drove frustrated pitchers to walk him.

The Irish loved sports, especially baseball, which they were sure the Yankees stole from an Irish game called rounders. Growing up Irish and surrounded by Revolutionary War memorials meant that, instead of playing cowboys and Indians, Tip and friends played "Down the English Yankees."

In 1914 Tip's father, high scorer on a civil service test, became sewer commissioner for Cambridge, enabling him to give patronage jobs to over 1,700 people and to influence private contractors. Tip learned urban ghetto patronage politics at home, at Knights of Columbus meetings, at other Catholic organizations, while arguing ball games in bars and in political clubs where card-playing, beer drinking, and political talk went hand in hand.

In his teens and into his twenties Tip hung out at Barry's Place, later called Barry's Corner, named after the Barry family who lived in a two-story building, 149 Ridgley Avenue, North Cambridge, where Rice, Cedar, and Middlesex streets converged. When the ground floor barbershop became vacant, Tip and friends pitched in 50 cents each to rent what became their lifelong club. Dave Barry, living upstairs, a Boston *Globe* sportswriter, sparked much figuring of baseball batting averages, dividing times at bat into number of hits. Practicing quick mental arithmetic stood Tip in good stead later as a quick vote counter in the state legislature and the U.S. House. Early Barry's Corner regulars were mainly Irish, some French Canadians, one black member, and Jewish member Lenny Lamkin, who later managed Tip's congressional district office. After the building was sold and torn down for apartments, Barry's Corner regulars met each June at the Veterans of Foreign Wars on Massachusetts Avenue. (Buckley 1994)

Tip lived by rules his father taught him: always to remember his roots, live a clean and honest life, show loyalty and reciprocity, fulfill responsibilities (you *are* your brother's keeper), share life's necessities with those in need, and resolve differences by compromise.

Tip heard much of the patronage politics of John F. (Honey Fitz) Fitzgerald, Boston's first Irish mayor, whose daughter Rose was John F. Kennedy's mother. But his practical political mentor was James Michael (Jim) Curley, three times Boston mayor and one-term Massachusetts governor. Jim Curley was to most a wily machine politician; to others a Robin Hood benefactor, the model for novelist Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah*, made into a popular John Ford-directed film in 1958, starring Spencer Tracy.

At age 16, still in school, O'Neill rang doorbells to get out the vote for New York Governor Al Smith's 1928 run for the presidency. O'Neill was popular with peers and teachers, active in sports, but an average student. On graduating from St. John's High School in 1931, he drove a brick company truck for a time. At age 20, in 1932, he helped get out the vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At the urging of his parish priest and his teacher, Sister Agatha, he entered Boston College in 1933. The Boston College yearbook for 1936 listed him as age 23, 6'2", weight 215 pounds.

In 1934, a college sophomore, he visited relatives in Washington, D.C. Missy LeHand, FDR's secretary, was from Tip's neighborhood in North Cambridge. She had earlier told him, "If you ever come to Washington, give me a call at the White House." He called. She invited him to the White House, met him at the gate, and asked, "Would you like to meet the president?" O'Neill later wrote, "I was speechless. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was like God to me." They met. Awe mixed with shock when O'Neill spoke to the wheel-chair bound president. That meeting also helped determine Tip on a political career to help have-nots. (O'Neill and Novak 1987)

Still in college and living at home in Cambridge, he ran for and lost by 150 votes election as North Cambridge city councilman, his only political defeat. Before the vote he was surprised when longtime neighbor Mrs. O'Brien said: Tom (he was called Tom at home), I will vote for you, even though you did not ask for my support.

Stunned, O'Neill said, "Mrs. O'Brien, I have lived across the street from you for 18 years, have cut your grass summers and shoveled snow from your walks winters. I didn't think I needed to ask for your vote. Mrs. O'Brien said, "Let me tell you something, Tom--people like to be asked."

O'Neill took this lesson to heart, the origin of his oft-repeated maxim, "All politics is local." Tip learned early that a politician serves at the pleasure of his constituents; that voters have names, faces, minds, and opinions; that they have problems they want your help on; and that they expect you to ask for their vote. (Editorial 1995, Nolan 1994)

At age 24 in 1936, just out of college, he won election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served eight terms (to 1952). The same Sister Agatha who got him to enter Boston College had earlier introduced him to longtime sweetheart Mildred Ann (Millie) Miller, a grade behind him at St. John's School and the daughter of a Boston elevated trainman. They were married in June 1941. She never dreamed she was marrying a lifelong politician. They had five children. Tip's autobiography is dedicated: "For Millie, the Speaker of My House, a loving wife and mother [of five], and my partner through so many triumphs and trials."

The Massachusetts Legislature

In eight tough elections to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, O'Neill emulated his father's and Jim Curley's service to constituents, while avoiding Curley's corrupt methods. He liked the social part of campaigning, ringing doorbells and meeting people. He was pleased when constituents told him they had vote for him because his father had helped one of their relatives when in need.

O'Neill began as one of 62 Democrats outnumbered by 178 Republicans. Republicans had dominated the Massachusetts legislature for over a hundred years. Most were Yankee Protestants from Boston's financial institutions and strongly pro-big business. Outnumbered, Democrats like O'Neill could do little to initiate new legislation but spent their time getting patronage jobs for their constituents. He helped many youngsters enter college by finding them summer jobs. He got their fathers New Deal public works jobs. As a House member, he regularly received 50 snow buttons for constituents for snow removal jobs at \$3 to \$4 a day. After a snow storm, the poor and jobless lined up outside his home for the snow removal jobs that put bread on their tables.

His first bill to become law removed license fees for youngsters selling newspapers and magazines. As a boy he had sold *The Saturday Evening Post* for pocket money. In 1937 he opposed a loyalty oath bill, an unpopular position to take since his constituents, especially veterans, were patriots. But his independent stand marked him as a man of principle and a potential leader. In 1947 he became House minority leader.

That year, Republican Governor Robert F. Bradford called O'Neill to his office and said: Mayor Jim Curley has been found guilty of mail fraud and is going to federal prison. If I remove

him as mayor, the Irish will say I am a bigot. If I let him be mayor again after his jail term, Republicans won't reelect me. I want to name City Clerk John Hynes as acting mayor until Curley gets out of prison. Will you ask Hynes if he will serve with that understanding? O'Neill went to Hynes, who said: if I take Curley's job, my city council bosses will take my clerkship job from me. Tell the governor I will fill in for Curley as mayor only if I am guaranteed my clerk's job. The recommendation went in that way. Curley was in jail five months until U.S. Representatives John McCormack got President Truman to pardon Curley. Years later, when O'Neill told Curley of his part in the affair, Curley asked: you did that? I always thought it was my lawyers, so I sent them clients who must have earned them a million dollars.

In 1948 O'Neill was called to the Boston district office of U.S. Representative John McCormack, then Minority Whip and the most influential Democrat in New England. McCormack said: If you take the lead in doing the necessary leg work, I can raise the money needed to win a Democratic majority in the Massachusetts House. Armed with campaign funds, O'Neill and aide, Tommy Mullen, went to Republican districts, identified the most popular Democrat, usually a lawyer back from World War II, and offered to pay his campaign costs if he would run as a Democrat for the Massachusetts House. The result of the massive statewide effort won the Democrats 120 seats over 118 Republican seats, a bare majority that reversed a hundred years of Republican rule. (Woodlief 1994)

O'Neill rose rapidly in the state House. His Democratic peers elected him Minority Leader in 1947 and Speaker in 1948. He pushed through many "little New Deal" bills. When a neighbor with two children with Downs syndrome told of having to lock them out of sight because of inadequate state facilities, O'Neill launched a campaign that made Massachusetts mental health services the best in the nation. He helped double teacher salaries and gained benefits for veterans and the elderly. Curley took him under his wing, giving him poems to memorize, books to read, and tips on how to make great speeches. O'Neill reciprocated in 1952, his last year as Massachusetts House speaker, by pushing through a pension bill for Curley, then old and in need.

John F. Kennedy

In 1946, O'Neill then 34, first met John F. Kennedy, then 28, skinny and bashful, still recovering from World War II wounds received while commanding a PT boat in the Pacific. Although backed by his rich father, Joseph P. Kennedy, with high political ambitions for his sons, John Kennedy seemed to local politicians then, including O'Neill, unlikely to go far. Some said jokingly that young Kennedy had thrown his diaper into the ring but didn't stand a chance. "But," O'Neill later wrote, "he grew like nobody I've ever known, and he went on to become one of the great political leaders of our time."

Initially Kennedy considered running as Massachusetts lieutenant governor, but his father decided instead that he should run for the U.S. House of Representatives. O'Neill was then running for his sixth term in the Massachusetts legislature. Father Joe's cousin, Joe Kane, managed Kennedy's campaign, stressed his war record, and got writer John Hersey, Pulitzer Prize winner for his novel, *A Bell for Adano*, to write of Kennedy's PT boat heroism. The article appeared as "Survival" in *The New Yorker*, was reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, and flooded the Massachusetts district Kennedy wanted to represent. That article plus the Joe Kane-run campaign plus father Joe's \$300,000 won Kennedy his U.S. House seat.

O'Neill was in a bind. Kennedy's competitor for the U.S. House seat was Mike Neville, O'Neill's Massachusetts House colleague who had come up through the Cambridge city council. Kennedy asked O'Neill repeatedly to back him, but O'Neill said he had to remain loyal to Mike Neville. After Kennedy won, he told O'Neill: I thought I could win you over, but I was wrong. You stuck with your buddy, Mike Neville. You are a man of your word. Next time I run, I want you on my side. Kennedy, like O'Neill, valued loyalty.

It was Kennedy who helped O'Neill get from the Massachusetts House to the U.S. House of Representatives. In January 1951, JFK confided to O'Neill that he (Kennedy) would run the next year either for the Massachusetts governorship or for the U.S. Senate. He wanted O'Neill to know that if O'Neill wanted to run for Kennedy's U.S. House seat, he had a year to get ready. O'Neill, definitely interested, won that seat, kept it for 34 years, and through it became a national figure.

Robert F. Kennedy

As a U.S. House member, O'Neill could name four delegates to the 1956 Democratic National Convention. Asking O'Neill to let his brother Robert be one of those delegates, John Kennedy said: Bobby is brilliant. I want him to work for me at the convention in case lightning strikes and I'm asked to be Adlai Stevenson's vice presidential nominee. O'Neill, who had already chosen three Massachusetts delegates, gave up his own delegate seat to accommodate Robert Kennedy. Robert showed no gratitude. O'Neill mentioned this incident to father Joe, who said: don't expect appreciation from my boys. They've had so much done for them that they expect such things. Jack is soft and forgiving, but when "Bobby hates you, you stay hated."

O'Neill heard in the late 1950s that Robert Kennedy planned to run for his (O'Neill's) House seat. A concerned O'Neill asked John Kennedy about this threat. After checking with father Joe, John Kennedy reported his father as saying, "Bobby will not be a candidate in Tip O'Neill's district....Tip is a friend of the family."

Years later, a *Newsweek* writer told O'Neill that in 1968 on a plane to Los Angeles, presidential candidate Robert Kennedy asked the writer how he knew so much about Congress. The writer said: I get my information from Tip O'Neill, "the sharpest guy on the Hill." Robert said, "Tip and I have never been friendly, but when I get back from this trip I'm going to look him up." Within days Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

O'Neill had political guile but held little rancor. Before O'Neill retired in 1986, the slain Robert F. Kennedy's son, Joseph P. Kennedy, 2nd, asked and received O'Neill's blessing to run in his district for his U.S. House seat. O'Neill's second maxim after "All politics is local," was "Yesterday's enemies are tomorrow's friends."

When John Kennedy became president in 1960, his U.S. Senate seat was held by his Harvard roommate until 1962, when Ted Kennedy, then age 30, won that same Senate seat. Two years later, 1964, Robert F. Kennedy won election to the Senate from New York. Father Joe planned and paid for these moves, including John F. Kennedy's 1960 successful run for the presidency.

Lyndon Johnson as Vice President

O'Neill helped get Lyndon B. Johnson to run as John F. Kennedy's vice presidential candidate. At the 1960 Democratic convention, O'Neill early saw that Kennedy would win on the first ballot. He so reported to key politicians. Present was U.S. House majority leader John McCormack, who said to Johnson's mentor, Sam Rayburn: Tip says Kennedy will get the nomination on the first ballot. Texas Congressman Pat Wright, also present, said to Rayburn: if Kennedy wants Lyndon as his running mate, Lyndon cannot decline. Rayburn, hitherto adamant that Johnson accept only the top spot, told O'Neill: tell Kennedy that if he wants Lyndon, to call me. I'll get Lyndon to accept. O'Neill reported all this to Kennedy, who said: I need Lyndon to win the national election. But I was afraid he would turn me down. Because of what you say, I'll call Rayburn. If he tells me Lyndon will accept, I'll make the offer.

Johnson still hesitated. Young, less experienced Kennedy had been his main opponent for the presidential nomination. To win Johnson over, Kennedy told O'Neill: bring Lyndon to Boston to give a major speech. Get out the crowds for him. Make Lyndon happy.

O'Neill got labor union members and students to attend, bands to play, and brought Lyndon to the Boston meeting just as crowds poured from office buildings. A mounted police officer directing traffic got off his horse to let Lyndon climb on. Waving a ten gallon hat, Lyndon made the horse rear back. The crowd went wild. Lyndon signed on as Kennedy's vice presidential candidate. The rest is history.

The Kennedy Presidency

Rayburn, O'Neill, and others struggled to get President Kennedy's bills through the House, but Kennedy's aides were inept at working with Congress. O'Neill himself broke ranks on Kennedy's federal aid to education bill. President Kennedy felt he had to bend backward to please those adamant about separation of church and state. O'Neill, irritated because parochial schools were denied federal funds despite using the same textbooks as the public schools, voted against the bill which, as it happened, never came out of the Rules Committee. Still, Kennedy held no hard feelings.

When Kennedy's aides threatened to replace House Speaker John McCormack, O'Neill brokered a reconciliation. Another difficulty occurred in 1961 when Kennedy asked O'Neill to help Ted Kennedy become the Democratic nominee as U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. Ted's Democratic opponent was John McCormack's nephew. O'Neill's intervention helped ease Kennedy-McCormack tension when Ted Kennedy won the Democratic nomination and defeated his Republican rival, Henry Cabot Lodge's son.

O'Neill was proud of Kennedy's presidential style; courageous handling of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis; and achievements in civil rights, space exploration, and arms control. O'Neill knew Kennedy to be skeptical about the military and believed Kennedy would have pulled us out of Vietnam if he had lived to win a second term.

They talked about the November 1963 Dallas trip. O'Neill asked Kennedy: why spend your time and energy patching up the Connelly-Yarborough conflict in Texas? Stunned by Kennedy's assassination, O'Neill discounted conspiracy theories. But five years later, he heard Kennedy intimates Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers say they were sure they heard two shots from behind the fence on the grassy knoll.. O'Neill said: that's not what you told the Warren Commission. They replied: we testified that way to avoid more pain for the family. After that, O'Neill was skeptical about the Warren Commission findings.

But O'Neill preferred to remember how he and the nation were thrilled by Kennedy's inaugural address ("Ask not what your country can do for you"). O'Neill admired Kennedy and Jackie's glamour, the talented people they brought to the White House, and their making Americans feel that this country had a place for everybody, regardless of race and religion.

President Johnson and Vietnam

In early August 1964 two American warships on intelligence patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin near North Vietnam were allegedly fired upon. President Johnson asked Congress for approval to take "all necessary measures" to halt Communist aggression in Southeast Asia. O'Neill hesitated to sign the Tonkin resolution. He confided to House Speaker John McCormack his suspicion that the military wanted to use the Tonkin incident for all out war. He told McCormack he was thinking of voting against the resolution. McCormack advised him not to vote against Tonkin. It will make you seem to be a traitor to your country.

Politically, McCormack was right, but O'Neill felt that his vote for Tonkin was the worst vote of his 34 years in the House. The House supported the resolution 414 to 0, the Senate 88 to 2, including support by Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, who later changed his mind and was Johnson's most powerful opponent on the war.

O'Neill, whose Congressional district had 22 colleges and universities, including Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was often asked to speak about the war. Protesters challenged his hawkish views. His home was picketed by war protesters, once by actress Jane Fonda. Challenged when he spoke at Boston College, his *alma mater*, where two of his children were then students, O'Neill told protesters: I think I know more than you do. I've been briefed by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, General William Westmoreland, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and the CIA.

A student then asked O'Neill: have you ever once been briefed by the other side? O'Neill was taken aback. The more he thought about it, the more he sought out dissenting views. Marine General David Shoup, who retired rather than go public with his dissent, told O'Neill that the U.S. was sending American boys to die in a war it could not win. Americans would simply not tolerate bombing North Vietnam to oblivion. O'Neill was told that hawkish advisors were keeping these and other dissenting views from President Johnson.

In June 1967 the O'Neills visited their daughter, a foreign service staff officer in Malta, a rest and recreation place for American military from Vietnam. O'Neill asked their opinion. He was told that the Vietnam War was not winnable, that it was only wasting American lives and resources. Deciding to go public, O'Neill told his Massachusetts constituents in a September 1967 newsletter: I now see the Vietnam conflict as a civil war in which U.S. involvement is wrong. Parents in his district with sons in Vietnam pilloried him. Millie O'Neill was berated.

A livid President Johnson confronted O'Neill in the White House: "What kind of an SOB are you?" O'Neill told Johnson of his many talks with dissidents and of his gradual conviction that the war was unwinnable unless North Vietnam was bombed to extinction, something the American people would never countenance. Johnson said: No, I can't do that. It would mean a third world war involving the USSR and China. Johnson put his arm around O'Neill and said: Tip, I see now that your changed view is a matter of conscience. Don't talk to the press. Give me time. I will read the anti-war reports, as you suggest.

O'Neill's now-dovish views became known. Anti-war groups asked his advice. He suggested that they influence families of soldiers in Vietnam to urge their Congressmen to break with the Administration's war policy. On March 31, 1968, an almost broken LBJ announced that he would not seek nor run for the presidency.

O'Neill played another little known part in ending the Vietnam War. House votes on bills were public record. But votes on *amendments* to bills, counted by unrecorded teller voting, were *not* publicly known. O'Neill tried but failed in the early 1960s to put an end to this unrecorded teller voting. Now, with Vietnam frequently on the agenda, Common Cause and other groups wanted the public to know of growing House member anti-war votes on amendments to bills. O'Neill lined up 182 sponsors. In August 1970 the House made votes on amendments public information.

A scholar writing on the Vietnam War later told O'Neill: very few people know of your part in ending that war. You broke with Johnson, swayed your Democratic colleagues, and ended unrecorded teller voting so that the public learned of mounting House votes on bill amendments against the Vietnam War.

O'Neill's last contact with Lyndon Johnson came during a televised football game in Dallas between the New England Patriots and the Dallas Cowboys. Interviewed at half time, LBJ said: I want to say hello to my two great friends in Boston, John McCormack and Tip O'Neill. Watching the game, O'Neill was touched that Johnson had forgiven him.

Rise in U.S. House Leadership

John McCormack retired as U.S. House Speaker in 1970, replaced by Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma with new House Majority Leader Hale Boggs of Louisiana. Wanting a regional balance and a big city liberal, the Democratic leadership chose O'Neill as Majority Whip in 1971 over other contenders. In October 1972 a plane carrying Hale Boggs disappeared in the Alaskan wilderness. Lengthy searches proved fruitless. Boggs had to be replaced. O'Neill announced his candidacy, was unanimously elected Majority Leader, and told Mrs. Lindy Boggs that if Hale came back, as they all prayed he would, he (O'Neill) would give up the office. O'Neill moved in, retaining in the office Hale's great seal of Louisiana until he moved into the Speaker's office in 1977. (Nolan 1994)

Watergate Crisis

O'Neill was involved in sensitive behind-the-scenes negotiations over the national constitutional crisis of Watergate. This 1973-74 crisis involved several overlapping events: Republican Vice President Spiro Agnew's forced resignation, Agnew's replacement as Vice President by Republican U.S. Representative Gerald Ford, President Richard Nixon's impeachment proceedings and forced resignation, Ford's succession as thirty-eighth U.S. President, and President Ford's pardon of Nixon.

Vice President Agnew

O'Neill was then House Democratic Majority Leader under House Speaker Carl Albert (his second term). Agnew was under grand jury investigation on charges of taking bribes on state and federal contracts as Baltimore County Attorney, as Maryland's Governor, and continuing as U.S. Vice President. Desperate for a way out, Agnew (or his lawyers) found a precedent when in 1827 the U.S. House had cleared Vice President John C. Calhoun of profiteering on Army contracts. On September 25, 1973, Agnew asked Carl Albert, O'Neill, and other House leaders that he be investigated by the House Judiciary Committee instead of by the courts.

Speaker Albert was willing to help Agnew, but O'Neill demurred, guessing that Agnew wanted a House investigation to drag on until he (Agnew) could legally collect a government pension. Agnew resigned October 12, 1973, allowing Nixon to name a successor. Nixon preferred his Treasury Secretary John Connelly, three-time Texas governor and Kennedy's Naval Secretary. But O'Neill and others told Nixon that House Democrats would not confirm Connelly, a Democrat-turned-Republican. Speaker Albert and O'Neill urged Nixon to consider Michigan's Republican Representative Gerald Ford. Ford was chosen on October 12, 1973, and confirmed by Congress on December 6, 1973.

On President Nixon

O'Neill was glad that the House Judiciary Committee did not have to investigate Agnew, for he believed it would soon be occupied with Nixon impeachment hearings. On June 17, 1972, inept burglars, found to be under White House orders, were arrested riffling the Democratic National Committee office in Watergate, a Washington, D.C., office-apartment complex.

Earlier, O'Neill had intimations from Republican-turned-Democratic Party fundraiser George Steinbrenner, a friend, who confided to O'Neill why he and others had stopped contributing to the Democrats. Steinbrenner said that he was being harassed by Republicans in government agencies. Difficulties would stop, he was told, if he gave money to a Democrats-for-Nixon campaign. O'Neill also heard of other illegal Republican fundraising tactics. He did not understand why Republicans were breaking the law in illegal fundraising when Nixon's reelection in 1972 seemed so certain.

Nixon occasionally played poker with O'Neill and other congressmen early in his eight years as Vice President under Eisenhower. As president he became aloof, suspicious, and imperial. O'Neill thought that what made Nixon and his staff nervous and secretive was Nixon's compulsion to defeat the Democrats so badly that they would not mount a challenge for another 20 years. O'Neill was disturbed when he put together the Watergate burglary with what he had earlier heard from Steinbrenner and others.

O'Neill knew that if House Democrats were going to respond to Watergate, it would fall on him (O'Neill) as Majority Leader, since Speaker Albert preferred to avoid controversy. In January 1973 O'Neill told Speaker Albert: We better get ready. Nixon is going to be impeached. Neither Albert nor other House leaders took O'Neill's warning seriously.

O'Neill also had intimations about the Nixon tapes before their existence was made known July 16, 1973, in Senate Watergate Committee hearings. Six months earlier (January 23, 1973), O'Neill and other congressmen were called to a White House briefing by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger about a Vietnam cease fire. Nixon kept interrupting Kissinger with long explanations of his own without letting Kissinger finish. O'Neill wondered why Nixon, while speaking, kept looking, not at them, but up at a ceiling chandelier. O'Neill guessed that Nixon was talking to a hidden microphone, giving his own version of the Paris cease-fire talks, a version in which he, not Kissinger, would be the hero. The tapes, O'Neill guessed, were to be used in Nixon's memoirs, which would make him look great in history and which when published would earn him a fortune.

At first, everyone shied away from impeachment talk, believing that constituents would vote out of office any congress member trying to impeach a sitting president. These thoughts persisted until O'Neill made known the April 1973 findings of his pollster, William Hamilton, that congress members voting for impeachment would not be seriously hurt politically. Hamilton's poll was confirmed when O'Neill spoke about possible impeachment in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Republican territory, without evoking resentment. The public now wanted to know if their president was a crook.

As early as July 31, 1973, Massachusetts Democratic Representative Father Robert Drinan introduced in the House the first impeachment resolution. At Speaker Albert's request, O'Neill asked Drinan to table the resolution, an important move as it turned out because a House vote that early would have defeated the Drinan impeachment resolution and Nixon would have finished his second term.

By a strange twist of history, Nixon's downfall was foreshadowed in a June 20, 1972, Brooklyn, New York, primary election for a House seat. Young attorney Elizabeth Holtzman defeated by 600 votes 84-year-old incumbent Emmanuel Celler, who was the House Judiciary Committee chairman. Celler would never have let the committee vote impeachment. But Celler's defeat made the next ranking Democrat, New Jersey Representative Peter Rodino, chairman of that committee. Rodino, like O'Neill, was Catholic, a liberal Democrat, and from an urban ethnic constituency. (Rodino had co-sponsored the bill making Columbus Day a national holiday.)

The complex national crisis came to a head when Vice President Agnew resigned October 10, 1973; his replacement by Representative Gerald Ford (sworn in as Vice President December 6, 1973); and Chairman Rodino's House Judiciary Committee's unassailable impeachment evidence. By resigning August 9, 1974, the only president ever to do so, Nixon kept a \$60,000 annual federal pension, office space, and other perks he would have lost if impeached.

That historic Rodino-chaired U.S. House Judiciary Committee also brought to national attention a new heroine, Texas Democrat Barbara Jordan, African American woman and a Lyndon Johnson protégé (he had urged that she be on that committee). Her impressive knowledge of the Constitution, eloquent diction, and moral authority won the nation's respect.

On August 9, 1974, Gerald Ford took the oath of office as the thirty-eighth U.S. President. A month later (September 8, 1974) Ford called O'Neill: I'm going to pardon Nixon. He's sick. His daughter Julie calls me every day about her father's depression. I don't want to see him go to jail. He's suffered enough. I can't run this office until I pardon him and end this national nightmare.

O'Neill thoughtfully concurred. He later called Ford, his golf playing friend, and said: Isn't this a wonderful country. We had a national Watergate crisis. We changed presidents with order and dignity. Without a revolution or a gun fired or even a fist fight. But we must be vigilant, O'Neill concluded, "Next time there may be no watchman in the night."

Ronald Reagan

O'Neill and Ronald Reagan, about the same age, both from working families, grew up Democrats during the 1930s Depression, with Franklin D. Roosevelt their common hero. O'Neill's father and Reagan's mother were renowned for serving the less fortunate. Both were sociable, outgoing, wonderful storytellers, sports buffs, had backed Harry Truman, condemned school lunch cuts, urged civil rights laws, and backed low-cost public housing. Reagan changed and became a Republican, O'Neill believed, when he made big money as a radio announcer and movie actor, bought California real estate, and found himself in the 90 percent tax bracket. He then moved in rich circles, forgot his roots, and reflected the anti-poor prejudices of rich friends.

Before the 1980 election, the Republicans tried to embarrass O'Neill and the Democrats. They ran a TV ad with an O'Neill-look-alike driving a fancy white car that ran out of gas. The voice-over made it humorously clear that it was time to vote out of office Democrats who had run out of ideas and out of favor. The TV ad backfired. Instead of hurting O'Neill, it made him a national figure. (Matthews 1994)

President-elect Reagan paid a courtesy call on Tip O'Neill, November 1980. They swapped stories about Notre Dame football. O'Neill explained how Congress worked and its relations with the Presidency. Reagan, thinking of other things, told how well he had worked with the California legislature. O'Neill said, "That was the minor leagues. You're in the big leagues now." Mr. President, O'Neill said, we disagree politically but can always be friends after working hours.

They were warm personal friends. But privately O'Neill was sad that Reagan, great on sports and movies, a gifted storyteller, fundraiser, and communicator, knew so little about the problems of ordinary working people, and knew so little about how government worked.

O'Neill believed that Reagan won the 1980 election not for his programs but because of the nation's long agony over American captives in Iran, because of Carter's failed rescue attempt, and because Americans wanted to end the Carter presidency. "Against a strong Democratic opponent in a healthy economy," wrote O'Neill, "Ronald Reagan would have had no...chance of being elected president of the United States."

Three days after President Reagan was shot in March 1981, O'Neill visited him. That shooting, O'Neill wrote, won Reagan public and media sympathy. Reagan's smile, good looks, and staff-managed public appearances helped make him a public hero.

Press acclaim, O'Neill believed, led Americans to think that Reagan's election victory had turned the country around. O'Neill pointed out that Reagan received less than 51 percent of the total popular vote, Carter 41 percent, and third party candidate John Anderson 6.6 percent. Since only 54 percent of eligible voters actually voted, the lowest percentage since 1948, Reagan's so-called landslide win was by fewer than 28 percent of eligible voters.

The press and the public, cynical about the presidency since John F. Kennedy's death, recalled Lyndon Johnson as crude, Richard Nixon as a liar, Gerald Ford as a bungler, and Jimmy

Carter as incompetent. In this atmosphere, the press portrayed Reagan as a folk hero and turned his presidency into one long photo opportunity.

During 1981-86 O'Neill felt alone confronting a Republican president and a majority Republican Senate bent on cutting social programs he (O'Neill) cared so much about. O'Neill was at a low point in his career. Millie saved him. She fixed his tie, kissed him, and asked, "Do you believe in what you are fighting for?" "I sure do," he answered. "Then go out and do your job," she said.

O'Neill was critical of the administration's invasion of Grenada in October 1983. It was O'Neill who finally blocked U.S. funding of right wing Contras in Nicaragua. Reagan aides called the Contras freedom fighters. Through his aunt, a Maryknoll sister, and through contacts with Maryknoll priests and nuns working in Nicaragua, O'Neill came to see the Contras as bandits and murderers. Asked after retirement what he was proudest of in his last years under the Reagan presidency, O'Neill said without hesitation saving social security. (O'Neill and Novak 1987; Farrell 1994)

In the 1980s O'Neill talked tough to Republican industrialists. Raise your hands, he told them, if you went to school on the GI Bill, were educated through the National Defense Education Act, or used a government loan to attend a private college. When 80 percent raised their hands, O'Neill asked, "Would you be here now without that help?" How can you sit there and back this administration that refuses to help the next poor guy up the ladder of success?

Reagan often told the anecdote of the black welfare woman who collected welfare checks under different names, even after Joe Califano and other Democrats proved that such cases never existed. Reagan knew the anecdote was not true, O'Neill said, but deliberately told it for the anti-Democrat-big-spender reaction it evoked. There are abuses in the military too, O'Neill wrote, but nobody demanded that the Defense Department be shut down. O'Neill called Reagan a rich man's president, helping the Pentagon on weapon systems and the wealthy on tax breaks, but without compassion for the poor.

O'Neill's Political Testament

O'Neill idolized Hubert Humphrey, Minnesota's Democratic Senator and Vice President under Johnson. Humphrey told O'Neill in 1978, "I won't be around much longer, but I know you'll be out there fighting for all the causes...you and I have supported." Both were sad. They knew Humphrey was dying of cancer.

O'Neill admired a statement from a Humphrey speech so much that he kept it framed in his office:

The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life--the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.

Man of the House.

O'Neill ended his 1987 political testament, *Man of the House*, by recalling that he began his political career in 1936 believing in work and wages. Fifty years later he was still a bread-and-butter liberal who believed that every family deserved to earn an income, own a home, educate their children, and afford medical care. Government, he believed, has an obligation to help all Americans achieve this dream.

The idea that government helps the needy is now out of favor, he wrote in 1987. Successful people today brag about "the good old days" and yearn for less government and fewer social programs. But in the so-called good old days of the 1930s, O'Neill recalled, half the population

lived in poverty, one-fourth were out of work, those with jobs worked long hours at low pay, only the rich had health insurance and social security, and there was no real middle class.

We have come far in 60 years, O'Neill wrote: high school education is nearly universal, almost two-thirds of young people enter higher education. Our country has a thriving middle class and a safety net for those who cannot help themselves. He remembered that day in June 1927, watching privileged Harvard graduates laughing and drinking champagne without a care in the world. He dreamed then of devoting his working life to bringing similar opportunities to all Americans.

In *Man of the House*, his political testament, O'Neill shrugged off the big spender label political foes pinned on him. What he cared most about was giving people a better chance at life. Many of his dreams, he wrote, had come true. But more still needed to be done.

Retirement

Sometimes ill, wanting more time with his family, and recalling that Speakers Rayburn and McCormack had stayed in office too long, O'Neill retired with the close of the 99th Congress. Polls showed him almost as popular as President Reagan.

On his last day, Friday, October 17, 1986, Congressional colleagues showered him with tributes. The Clerk read House Resolution 603, thanking him for the "able and impartial manner" in which he had presided as Speaker, and wishing him "a richly deserved and fulfilling retirement." Majority Leader Thomas Foley said, "All of us on both sides of the aisle sense that this is a truly historic occasion." O'Neill's longtime colleague in both the Massachusetts House and the U.S. House, Representative Edward Boland said of him, "He [is] one of the most recognizable figures in America, and [as Speaker] rivals the influence of...Clay, Reed, Cannon, Rayburn, and McCormack."

Ed Boland and O'Neill, both Irish Catholic, sports buffs, and the same age, were elected to Congress from Massachusetts the same year, 1952. Tip and Millie O'Neill had early decided it would be best for his political career for him to stay in Washington Mondays through Thursdays, with long weekends back home in North Cambridge. Boland and Neill shared a Washington, D.C., apartment for 25 years, 1952-76. When O'Neill became Speaker, the family joined him in a condominium home in Maryland.

Before O'Neill's farewell address, Pennsylvania Representative Murtha gave O'Neill an Irish blessing:

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.
Until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His Hand.

In his farewell to Congress, O'Neill's said:

Fifty years ago I ran for public office and...never expected it to be a career as long as this.We will always be great as long as we recognize the rights of one another across the aisle.I will always be a man of the House of Representatives. (*Congressional Record* 1986)

He walked off the floor to thunderous applause, the longest continuous House Speaker since Congress first met in 1789.

Last Years

A familiar sight on C-SPAN, whose televised House coverage he helped initiate, he became a big hit in TV commercials. His tall rumped heavy-set figure with bulbous nose and white thatched hair made him instantly recognizable as he popped out of a suitcase in one TV ad and plugged Federal Express in another TV ad. He joked about his girth, long since expanded to some 260 pounds, saying that he had lost thousands of pounds over the years on various diets.

O'Neill kept a busy pace in retirement, despite some illness in 1987: colostomy surgery at Brigham and Women's Hospital to remove a cancerous tumor on November 18. . Twelve days later he had another operation for an enlarged prostate. He was later hospitalized for pneumonia and other ailments.

Honors

When Harvard University gave him an honorary degree in June 1987, he was touched less by the degree than by students' long sustained applause. Over a long political career, Harvard scholars had largely dismissed him as a machine politician. He had never sought to curry their favor. Time passed. Attitudes changed. The North Cambridge man who as a 14-year-old had cut Harvard lawns for seventeen cents an hour, had moist eyes when Harvard students gave him thunderous applause.

He received other honorary degrees, including one from Boston College, his *alma mater*. Boston College also named the main library on the Chestnut Hill campus for him and endowed a chair in political science in his name. Gifts for the latter totaled \$1.3 million from alumni and others. (Nolan 1994)

At a November 18, 1991, White House ceremony President George Bush awarded O'Neill the Medal of Freedom. The citation ended: "The United States honors this distinguished legislator for his leadership, amity, good humor and commitment to service and freedom." (Nolan 1994)

Ten years earlier, in February 1981, O'Neill had privately teased Bush when the new Republican President Reagan gave his economic views before a televised joint session of Congress. Speaker O'Neill and Vice President Bush sat on the dais in full public view behind Reagan. Retaining their public smiles, O'Neill, during applause, whispered to Bush, "Voodoo economics, George; Voodoo economics." It was the phrase Bush had used publicly about Reagan when they competed as Republican presidential rivals. Bush, embarrassed but smiling, whispered back, "Quiet, Tip, quiet."

Death

Wednesday night, January 5, 1994, Tommy (Thomas P. O'Neill, 3rd, former Massachusetts lieutenant governor) sat with his father in Brigham and Women's Hospital. Tip was there for tests, having recently felt unusually tired. They ate coffee ice cream and talked about how well the Boston College football team had done that season, especially quarterback Foley. You know, he's a North Cambridge boy, said Tip. You know who his grandmother was? Verna, who used to run Verna's Dough Nut Shop, across the street from the church (St. John's, North Cambridge). It was a landmark in the neighborhood for years. Remember Verna's honey dipped doughnuts? Gee, those were great doughnuts.

Tip grew quiet, said he felt tired and went to bed.

Tip O'Neill died that night (January 5, 1994), age 81, of cardiac arrest, the last Democratic leader of the old school, a familiar congressional figure and easily the most beloved. President Bill

Clinton, whose own mother died within an hour of O'Neill's death, said: "Tip O'Neill was the nation's most prominent, powerful and loyal champion of working people." (O'Neill 1994)

Funeral

Funeral events for Tip O'Neill, held in bone-chilling cold weather during January 8-11, 1994, was by any measure one of the grandest in recent New England memory. A snow storm which had closed Logan Airport subsided, allowing dignitaries to land from all over the United States and abroad. Not since James Michael Curley died in 1958 had a Bay State dignitary lain in state in the Massachusetts State Capitol, Beacon Hill, Boston.

The O'Neill family came to the lying in state early Saturday, January 8, 1994. By one estimate, some 7,000 visitors braved the outside cold (22 degrees Fahrenheit with a wind chill of three below zero), climbed the steep outdoor steps of the state capitol, entered the impressively domed and bedecked Hall of Flags, and filed solemnly past O'Neill's flag-draped open casket. Eyes were moist, journalists noted, when U. S. Representative from Boston J. J. Moakley knelt and touched O'Neill's shoulder in the casket. Others were moved when one of Tip O'Neill's grandsons reached into the casket and put a fresh cigar in the Speaker's coat pocket.

Funeral Mass

The Rev. John P. Carroll, O'Neill's grammar school friend, presided at the funeral mass, Sunday, January 9, 1994, at St. John the Evangelist Church, North Cambridge. Boys from the St. Paul Choir School of Boston filled the church with music, ending with "America the Beautiful." The casket was wheeled to the front of the church.

On the front pews near the casket sat Millie O'Neill, son Tommy, U.S. Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore, former presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, Massachusetts Governor William F. Weld, and U.S. Representative Joseph P. Kennedy, 2nd (D. Mass.).

Frank Minelli, O'Neill's barber, sat near former U.S. House Speaker Thomas Foley. John Gimigliano, O'Neill's shoe cobbler friend, sat alongside retired Red Sox star Carl Yastrzemski. Lenny Lamkin, who had managed O'Neill's district office, sat near Vice President Al Gore.

Minelli, Gimigliano, Lamkin, Russ Cutter, and others were Barry's Corner regulars, one of whom reminded the others that Tip O'Neill had said he'd rather be a lamppost on Barry's Corner than be with any of the important people he'd ever met around the world. Another of the Barry's Corner regulars recalled that some 500 had attended the June 1986 Barry's Corner reunion when they heard Tip O'Neill would not run for the House again. Hearing this, Russ Cutter, a Barry's Corner original, wept. (Buckley 1994)

Prominent Republicans present were, besides former President Ford, Senator Howard Baker (R. Tenn.), Bush's deputy chief of staff Andrew Card, Representative Robert Michel (R. Ill.), and Senator Robert Dole (R. Kan.). The many Democrats included Representative Dan Rostenkowski (D. Ill.), former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D. Mass.), Senator Joseph Biden (D. Del.), and Senator Christopher Dodd (D. Conn.), former U.S. House Speaker Jim Wright (D. Texas), Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, Democratic White House Budget Director Leon Panetta, former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, and other state officials and legislators.

Over 150 members of Congress had come for the funeral, along with a delegation from Ireland led by Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan Quinn. Cardinal Bernard Law delivered the final blessing.

First to speak after the Mass was granddaughter Catlin, who read "The Sermon on the Mount," which Tip O'Neill once called the greatest political speech of all time.

Daughter Rosemary read an Irish poem, "Lament for the Death of Owen Rowe O'Neill" by Thomas Davis. The last three lines of this lament for a fallen 17th century Irish hero at the massacre of Drogheda, Ireland (1649), reads:

Oh! why did you leave us Owen, why did you die?
Your troubles are all over, you rest with God on high
But we're slaves and we're orphans, Owen!
Oh! why did you die?

U.S. Representative J.J. Moakley of Boston recalled humorous incidents in the 40 years he had been with O'Neill. Once, they were together when Moakley spotted Warren Beatty heading toward them. Knowing that O'Neill seldom went to the movies, Moakley said, "Mr. Speaker, you know Warren Beatty." O'Neill said, "Warren, ol' buddy." They talked for awhile. O'Neill gazed into Beatty's eyes and said, "Gee, you're a good looking bum. You oughta be a movie star." Warren Beatty laughed, patted O'Neill's shoulder, and said, "Tip, you're always kidding," and walked away. Moakley asked, "Tip, you know who that was?" O'Neill said, "Yeah, the lion tamer Clyde Beatty's son."

A Son Remembers

Tommy O'Neill, smiling, eyes glistening, told of being with his father the night he died, of their eating coffee ice cream, talking about football and quarterback Foley and about Foley's grandmother, Verna, and her wonderful honey dipped doughnuts. Tommy listed other things his father loved, including Boston College, America, Congress, Democrats of course, and even Republicans. Being Catholic and a joker, Tommy smiled, my father always said about Republicans, "Hate the sin but love the sinner," even President Reagan, his beloved nemesis, whom he loved to call "Reegan."

Tommy told how, to family and intimates, when Reagan's name came up, his Dad would laugh and say, "Ballyporeen!," the name of the Irish village where President Reagan's family came from. "Know what it means?" he'd ask. "Valley of the small potatoes," he'd answer and roar with laughter.

Our Dad, said Tommy, loved North Cambridge, Barry's Corner, St. John's Parish, and his family:

You, Kip. You, Michael. You, Susan. You, Rosemary. You, Chip. You, Jo-Ann. You, Jackie. All you grandchildren. And, Mommy, the world knows he loved you. {He} always said that if he hadn't met Millie, he'd have gone into the Church, to be a priest....And he loved God, who has called him home. (McGrory 1994)

Eyes misted as Tommy ended with a poem Jim Curley once gave Tip O'Neill to memorize, a poem Tip O'Neill often recited for departed friends at Barry's Corner reunions and at wakes.

Around the corner I have a friend,
In this great city that has no end;
Yet days go by, and weeks rush on,
And I never see my old friend's face,
For life is a swift and terrible race.
He knows I like him just as well
As in the days when I rang his bell
And he rang mine. We were younger then,
And now we are busy, tired men;
Tired with playing a foolish game,
Tired with trying to make a name.
"Tomorrow," I say, "I will call on Jim,

Just to show that I'm thinking of him."
But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes,
And the distance between us grows and grows.
Around the corner-yet miles away..
"Here's a telegram, Sir..."
"Jim died today."
And that's what we get, and deserve in the end;
Around the corner, a vanished friend."

So Long, Mr. Speaker

Journalists, out in force, eagerly collected remembrances about O'Neill which filled Boston newspapers, some of which follow:

- Former U.S. Representative Brian Donnelly from Dorchester told how O'Neill saved homes in his district from the wrecking ball. State officials pored over plans for a tunnel, part of the Central Artery project, which called for tearing down East Boston homes. "Over my dead body," O'Neill growled, lumbering to the blueprints, flicking ashes from his cigar over them, frightening state Transportation Secretary Fred Salucci, who yelled: O.K., O.K., we don't knock down Eastie houses. (Miga 1994)
- Donnelly also told of an immigrant family from Brockton who came to him seeking U.S. citizenship for their son just killed in Vietnam. Donnelly found himself so snarled in red tape that in desperation he took the family to O'Neill. Tip listened patiently, rang up U.S. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter Rodino, explained, and when Rodino balked, O'Neill roared, "Peter, you didn't here me. This kid's gonna be an American before the day is over." That day the dead soldier became an American citizen by vote of Congress. (Miga 1994).
- Gene Hurley of Needham told how O'Neill helped him receive his veteran's disability benefits. "He always had a minute for you. And he never promised anything he couldn't deliver."
- Eva S. Dspanos of Cambridge remembered how the Speaker filed legislation to allow her and her brother, both from Greece, to remain in America.
- U.S. Representative Joseph P. Kennedy 2nd (Robert Kennedy's son) recalled how he asked for and got retiring O'Neill's endorsement to run for Congress from his (O'Neill's) district.
- Neither Art Bardige nor his wife Betty ever met O'Neill but said that they felt he fought for average people, for fairness and justice and that it was important for their kids to see the funeral of this man.
- Linda and John Norton came to the funeral because O'Neill, a family friend, attended all their family wakes. We last "saw him at my wife's uncle's funeral," said John Norton. "He just stood quietly in the back. He was a special guy."
- Golf caddy Frank Doherty of Waltham said that being on the golf course with him was nonstop entertainment. "He didn't care where the ball went; he only cared about finishing the story."
- "Without [O'Neill], I wouldn't have made it," said blue blood Yankee and former Governor Endicott "Chub" Peabody. O'Neill had introduced him in working-class Irish wards by saying, "His name may not be O'Peabody, but he'll make a good Democratic governor." (Woodlief and Crittenden 1994)

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