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Roy O. Day (November 22, 1971)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. ROY O. DAY

November 22, 1971
Pomona, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Roy O. Day in Pomona, California. The date is November 22, 1971, Arena interviewing. Shall we begin, Mr. Day, by my asking you where and when you were born?
- DAY: I was born in Pomona, California where we are right now, October 20, 1900.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you where your father was born? How far are the family roots in California?
- DAY: My father was born in Iowa, mother was born in Missouri, and they both came here in the late '90's. My father was an orange rancher until his retirement.
- ARENA: Do you happen to know if that would be around the time that Pomona itself was founded?
- DAY: It was after Pomona had been founded. It probably was ten to twelve years after Pomona was founded as a city.
- ARENA: In that sense they were pioneers of this community.
- DAY: Some of the earliest, yes.
- ARENA: You might be aware that the President, himself, belongs to that type of a pioneering situation. His Grandfather [Franklin] Milhous came to Whittier ten years after it was founded in '87, which is when Whittier was founded by the Quakers, and his grandfather came in 1897.

DAY: Those are comparable dates.

ARENA: Yes, they are. Would you mind giving a general summary of your formal education?

DAY: My formal education won't use up very much tape. I attended the Pomona schools and I left high school. I wanted to go into the Navy. My parents would not sign my papers, as I was under eighteen years of age at the time I wanted to go in. When I was old enough I still wanted to go and so I was kind of mixed up about the school situation anyway. I left school and went to Arizona to work. I had taken a commercial course in school. I went to work for the Ray Consolidated Cooper Company in Ray, Arizona, where I was for two years. And pitched some baseball on the side. Then I came back and went into the Navy anyway for two years. Since that time I came back to work for the newspaper here. I went to work for the Pomona Progress. That was before the merger of the Progress and the Bulletin, which was a morning paper. I went to work for them in April of 1924 and worked for them for twenty-seven years, at which time they made it possible for me to buy the commercial printing business and separate it, because the paper had grown to the point where they couldn't operate a commercial printing business and I developed quite a commercial printing following. So, from that time it has been my own business, the commercial printing end, first known as P. B. Press, using the initials of the newspaper. And later in 1957 changing to Day Printing Corporation which it is now.

ARENA: For the record, would you mind stating the very first time you had contact--not necessarily face to face--but contact with Mr. Richard Nixon?

DAY: My first contact with Richard Nixon was at the time I had developed a Fact Finding Committee of a hundred citizens scattered throughout the old Twelfth Congressional District. I had become interested in politics. I had become somewhat discouraged, to say the least, with my own Republican Party because I felt they were not developing candidates that even deserved to win. Jerry Voorhis, who had been in Congress for ten years, was a Democrat incumbent. We were determined to try to find a candidate who was worthy of all out support and could get the support of the public and win in this district, which was really nominally a Republican district, or should be. The Democrat incumbent had spent a great deal of time and effort in catering to the Republicans in order to insure his position in the Congress, which made it somewhat more difficult to dislodge him with a less than capable Republican candidate.

And in 1944 I was involved. I had talked so much that they told me to show a little active activity in behalf of the party, so I attended the meeting at which they picked the Republican

nominee at that time. I was convinced he was not the type of person who could really represent the majority of the citizens in this district. He was a very fine man, but I didn't feel he belonged in Congress. So I determined to do something about it. That's when I determined to form this committee of a hundred citizens. I figured a hundred was a good number to work with. I checked the registered Republicans in each community of the Twelfth Congressional District and divided up as fairly as I could. So many from Pomona. So many from Whittier [California]. So many from El Monte [California] and San Marino [California], and so on. Then I called a meeting. The first reaction to my gesture in this regard was that some of them thought I was setting up a campaign myself, and I had to reassure them nothing was further from my mind than running for Congress myself.

ARENA: Excuse me, Mr. Day. Have you ever been involved in that type of politics? Have you ever run for any office?

DAY: No, sir. I never have. So, we had interviewed several candidates and we sent a written story out. In view of my connection with the newspaper, it was a very logical thing for me to do to contact other newspapers and plant stories telling exactly what we were trying to do. We didn't have any hand-picked candidate. We didn't have anybody we were going to pull out of the closet the last minute. We were honestly searching for a candidate we could get behind of and really win with. And we had a lot of answers. It has been said in some quarters that we ran paid ads. This is not so. That was not correctly stated. It has appeared in print that we did, but we didn't. These were all news stories contributed by the various papers. At some points in this effort it became somewhat discouraging because we talked to some of these candidates and listened to them, with little enthusiasm as a result. We gave them a chance to appear before the committee. We had meetings in various parts of the district and we were getting a little discouraged. In fact, our Assemblyman Ernest Geddes, in our state legislature--whose campaign I had handled as a write-in campaign, my first really genuine and successful effort in a campaign two years previously --put in his name to keep the show on the road because he really didn't expect to go to Congress but he helped me out to the extent of letting us use his name so our effort wouldn't die on the vine.

Then, through a grand old man of Whittier, now passed on to his reward, Herman Perry--one of the finest people I ever met--I learned about this man Richard Nixon. We had at that point been thinking a little bit about Walter Dexter, who had run unsuccessfully before that. Dr. Dexter had been the international president of Lions [Club] of which I am a past district governor. I knew him personally. I knew the caliber of man he was. And so I called Dr. Dexter in Sacramento [California] and asked him what he knew about Richard Nixon and he gave me this answer in just

about these words. He said, "This man will go to the top of anything he goes into. He's that caliber of person. He's a born leader." That night, Dr. [Walter F.] Dexter died of a heart attack in Sacramento that very evening, which was a very unfortunate coincidence.

Well, the next thing was to get Richard Nixon out here from Washington. At that time you couldn't just get on a plane and fly because you wanted to. You had to have some business reason, even though he was wearing a Navy uniform with two gold stripes on it at that time. But through Boyd Gibbons, a San Marino Ford dealer at that time who knew the president of some airline, I think it was American [Airlines, Inc.], he was able to get him on. I have a letter in my file somewhere where it said he got instantaneous service to get this man out here so we could get a look at him.

He came out with his wife [Patricia Ryan Nixon] and I met Richard Nixon the first time at an informal dinner of his friends in Whittier in which I sat and listened to him. When he finished talking I said, "This is salable merchandise, this man can be sold." I judged him by his appearance, his straight forwardness, his obvious sincerity and his obvious desire to be of service to his fellow man, that he wasn't just wanting to run and say, 'Here I am you lucky people. I'll be a candidate.' He has never once given me that impression in all the years that I've known him. And that's why I hold him in high regard, among other reasons.

In the meantime, his wife had gone to a tea party over in San Marino with some of the ladies. The only comment I had back concerning her was, "She was a lovely lady but she wore the wrong color nail polish," which I thought was very funny. I thought that was a very fine analysis to get for the quality of woman who is one of the most gracious, lovely women that ever graced the White House. It's so ridiculous I can't help mentioning it. I used this in Australia on a telecast and they made that the headline on a story. In fact, the headline on a four column story in the Sydney [Australia] newspaper the next day was, "The day Pat wore the wrong nail polish almost voted Dick out of politics." That's what they picked out of everything good that I said about Pat to headline their story. But they are inclined to do that down there a little, I found out.

So that's where I first met Dick and I was very much impressed with him. He had to return back to Glen Martin Aircraft in Baltimore [Maryland] where he was handling renegotiation of Navy contracts. Then we made our plans to get this campaign underway at our meeting in, I believe it was, South Pasadena [California] that we met and decided to go with him. It was practically unanimous the first vote. There were a few courtesy votes for one or two others, but it was made unanimous very rapidly on the second ballot. It was all over but going to work and doing the job. So, then we got him out here to launch his kickoff campaign which was set up here in Pomona at the Ebell Clubhouse on [Abraham] Lincoln's

birthday in 1946. We had about four hundred there from all over the district and it was my job to set the meeting up, being chairman of this Committee of 100. I might mention that up to this time we called our group a Fact Finding Committee of 100, and at this point we changed it to the Nixon Congressional Campaign Committee and we still didn't call it a Republican Campaign Committee. That shows how far down we were at that point. Later we changed it to the Republican Campaign and called ourselves by our right name. But the Republicans had been kicked around so much in our district by this man [Jerry] Voorhis that we decided it was time to stay undercover until we could come out from cover and have something to talk about. We had it in Richard Nixon.

ARENA: Let me ask this question from the standpoint of the craft of history. Do you mind summarizing the papers and documents that you have in your possession so that future historians--with your permission, of course--would have an idea of what you have as they go through the search for this very important political history? Would you give a general summary of the papers and documents you have relevant to the things you've been discussing now and since? It isn't necessary to indicate every single letter and date, but more or less the general items.

DAY: I have, that I'm very proud of, a letter written on three sheets of foolscap paper, handwritten by Mr. [Richard] Nixon where he summarized his opinion of the results of our first meeting where we launched our campaign, and the results of the primary campaign and his opinion of what happened. And correspondence back and forth with Mr. Nixon on what we should do and what we shouldn't do in the campaign, and with others in the district. Including one of the choicest letters which was direct criticism of myself as chairman of the County Central Committee for this district in having the nerve to try to pick one candidate and not let everybody run at their will. My answer to that was, "Do we want to win an election or don't we." I went right ahead because I had the support of people that I felt were important enough that I could go with it. I felt if I was going to head the committee that I was going to play to win. I only played football in the Navy and baseball semi-pro, and I always played to win and that's what I was trying to do with this situation. I knew we could win if it was handled right. I felt we could.

So I have these letters and different folders and statements made by Richard Nixon all the way up through the Senate. The Congressional campaign, of course, and then the Senate campaign. Before he made the determination to run for the Senate I had correspondence with him. In fact, I had dinner with him before he met with a committee of nine, I believe it was, in [Thomas W.] Tom Bewley's law office to formally announce he was going to run.

We had planned it in Pico Rivera [California], talked it over, and he had made a tour of the state to more firmly establish his decision to run, even though he had really decided to all intents and purposes to run before that time. But there was opposition to him running because, well, Herman Perry hated to see him run. He criticized me. He said I was a rather cold blooded politician, I was going to destroy a brilliant young Congressman. Of course, nothing was further from my thought. My answer to that was, "When a man's star is up, he has to go." Richard Nixon had just exploded the Alger Hiss case. They had given him terrific favorable publicity and I thought that was the time to move. I had had some reports that Sheridan Downey probably wouldn't run and I felt that even though the odds were a little rough, that it was time to go. And that was proven correct because it's a matter of history what he did to his opponent in the Senate race.

And then in the Vice-Presidential race, that was a natural. I was in Chicago [Illinois] and I knew that Dwight Eisenhower wanted Dick for his running mate and he picked him. I had an interesting little conversation with Drew Pearson. He came around trying to find out something. He knew that I was associated with Richard Nixon and I was sitting having lunch with [Patrick J.] Pat Hillings and two or three others there in the Ambassador East, Chicago. He came over and said, "I hear great things about you, Mr. Nixon" to Dick. Dick was with us, too, at the luncheon. Dick looked up kind of half way at him and he said, "Oh, you hear great things about most anybody around here," and didn't even turn to look at him. There has never been any love lost between Richard Nixon and Drew Pearson. That's entirely another story that Pearson has been on Nixon's back ever since the committee of eighteen and some ill-founded stories quite heavily lacking in truth that exploded the night his train left Pomona when he took off for the Vice-Presidential campaign in the western states.

ARENA: Indicate also, as you were doing, that you have some photographs that also document your personal contact with the President over the years.

DAY: Oh, yes. I have photographs. There is one on the wall here that the professor is looking at. It was taken in San Francisco [California]. That was before I lost forty pounds, but it's still me up there. I have one taken in Oklahoma City [Oklahoma]. This is an interesting sidelight of my son-in-law and my daughter. My son-in-law had worked for Governor Bellman in Oklahoma and he ended up marrying my oldest daughter. And my oldest daughter and next oldest daughter happened to sing duets for the President's campaigns during the Senate, and later gatherings. They used to sing wonderful ballads like "Five Foot Two and Eyes of Blue," and songs like that. Of course, the President knew them and they presented the roses to Pat Nixon on the platform when he launched his Vice-Presidential campaign.

ARENA: And that photograph captures that moment.

DAY: Yes it does.

ARENA: And the group of gentlemen in this photograph on the bottom?

DAY: That was the Committee of 100. We had a reunion at a motel just east of the race track at Santa Anita over in Arcadia [California]. And we allowed no press in, except Life photographers were present and shot some pictures. Kiddingly, I announced that I tried to bring Harry Truman in to play some piano music for entertainment, but I couldn't get him. So, without saying a word Dick Nixon steps over to the piano and plays the Missouri Waltz--a little sideline on our entertainment features. A lot of these people were no longer with us, but still about sixty, I believe, are alive of this Committee of 100.

The Committee of 100 actually expanded to one hundred and twenty-one, because I had some heat turned on me for not including the official party structured people on the committee. At first I didn't want them to, even though I was chairman of the district. I wanted this to be a true Fact Finding Committee of representative citizens throughout the Twelfth District that would not have any political implications or party pressure. But I was very strongly urged to add the County Central Committee members, so I did finally add the twenty-one members from the three Assembly districts, Forty-ninth, Fiftieth and Fifty-third to the Fact Finding Committee when we actually commenced deliberations. It worked out very satisfactorily. We had complete unanimity; we never had any violent discord of any kind, and it certainly, in my mind, worked out perfectly, and subsequently Mr. Frank Jorgenson became chairman for the next campaign and they've used the same plan since in several places.

In his first campaign I felt that the only way to really get at this man Jerry Voorhis was to find his weakness. He had to be vulnerable someplace. And I kept telling Dick Nixon that we had to have an aggressive campaign and an affirmative campaign. I have never fought any political battles after that, before or after or during, on a defensive basis. And I felt that we had to carry the battle to Jerry Voorhis to discredit his job as a representative; not smear him, deal entirely in facts, and I have since constantly repudiated any inference that we called Mr. Voorhis a Communist, because I don't believe he is a Communist. I don't think he ever was. I just felt that his beliefs were decidedly contrary to the beliefs of the vast majority of people that lived in the Twelfth Congressional District. That's what we had to prove.

So we set up some very elaborate coffee hours. We had Pat Nixon going to them and the President, himself, came as a candidate for Congressman. He would come in for a half an hour and

talk. I felt in sizing up our candidate Richard Nixon, he was a man who was very sincere and he was a man that wanted the facts. He wanted both sides of the story. I spent many hours with him sitting on the floor of the house he had rented from some barber over in Whittier and we would analyze the issues. We would take a position tentatively on something and then decide what would our opponent say, and who's right, who's wrong, and what effect would it have on the people. I was a firm believer in concentrating our fire in not over three directions. I don't believe in using a "shotgun," I've never believed in using a "shotgun" approach to knock down an opponent. I believe an effective rifle shot at the right time, and at the time you see the "whites of their eyes" is the time and way to beat them. Also, having later watched [Thomas] Tom Dewey's campaign for President, I realized he lost the presidency by firing all of his bullets too far ahead of the election. The little man, the necktie salesman from Missouri [Harry S. Truman] came up with one or two shots that swayed enough people to save the election for him. So, I believe that elections are won in the last ten days before the voting, won or lost, and if you haven't anything left to talk about then, you're in pretty bad shape. I think you should save your best shots or built up to a climax.

Now, I want to bring up another point when I worked with Dick Nixon in the first campaign. The first trouble I had was a lot of well wishers in various towns, all very fine, sincere, dedicated people who would turn in publicity stories and inadvertently giving their own personal version of what Dick Nixon was going to stand for and what he was doing. I saw where this was going to really get us in trouble. So I got hold of a man named Murray Chotiner whom I had met, who was doing some publicity around Los Angeles [California]. I thought he was a very able person, a very good writer, and I gave him a sum of money out of our meager campaign funds. I think it was three hundred dollars, or something like that, to write a few publicity stories for us. I would check them myself and I felt very free to cut them out or use them, however, he was a tremendous help. It did give me-- whether I used them or not or even used some of my own I might concoct through events that were happening in the district--it gave me something to tie to what we had, only one source of consistent publicity releases. We couldn't have different publicity chairmen around the district putting in their personal versions, which would have really messed up the whole campaign. I think that was an important move that helped us a great deal. We had control of publicity. We were able to hold back the stories we didn't want to run too early.

Then I finally found the crack in Jerry Voorhis' armor. I listened to some of his speeches, a couple of them. I made it my business to go to service clubs where he was speaking. I would try to sit pretty well front, instead of sitting in the back, which most people would do in a situation like that. I'd try to get right up under his nose, if I could arrange it. And I noticed he was a very nervous person. He was always twitching his

glasses and just naturally was nervous. So I'd have a doodle pad and a pencil and I'd look up at him and look down at the pad. I drove the man crazy in a few service club meetings. I found where he was vulnerable. I had him so self-conscious and worrying about what I was writing down. Actually, I wasn't writing anything down most of the time. Once in a while I would take a note. But usually I was just scribbling. So I decided I knew where he was vulnerable.

Before the campaign started--I'll go back to this now because we're getting to that point--we had received a letter, as had Roy McLaughlin in the 1944 campaign and the others, a very formal letter from Congressman Voorhis saying he hoped they'd be able to meet on the platform and discuss the issues before the voters of the Twelfth Congressional District. We sat on this letter until we were ready to move. Then we wrote Congressman Voorhis an acceptance; we named the places where we would like to appear, and said we would adjust our schedule to suit his so that he couldn't back out of it. I think after the first appearance Voorhis would have liked to have cancelled all of them. We had people in the audience to ask certain questions and the big dent in Jerry Voorhis' armor was that he had consistently the entire time he had been in Congress sent out news releases saying that he had introduced legislation into Congress to do something for the veterans, or the farmers, or this and that organization. And the people, not being as aware politically as they've become since, never checked through to see what happened to the bills. I did some research along these lines myself, and then, of course, having Dick Nixon checking as he obviously was. We arrived at a very interesting point. So we decided to blow him out of the water at a certain climactic point, and that was the fourth in the series of debates that took place at Monrovia High School [Monrovia, California], Whittier, and at Bridges Hall up in Claremont [California]. We kept him on a very high level at these.

Then at San Gabriel Mission Playhouse we decided to fire our big gun. It was pretty heavily Democratic in that area so we decided to get a little more down to eyeball to eyeball there and that's where I was supposed to ask the question. We had real good moderators always. Everything was kept under control. We had a top school man or citizen who was able to handle the meeting, keep it under control. We had no trouble at any of the meetings. So, in this meeting in the question period I jumped up and asked to be recognized and I asked, "Congressman Voorhis, what bill, if any, introduced by you the entire ten years you've been in the Congress of the United States has ever been enacted into law?" Voorhis sat there fumbling with his glasses as he walked up to the podium and he called me by name and said, "Why, Mr. Day, you certainly read. . . ." and so on, and he went through the same harangue. So when he sat down Nixon slowly walked up with a copy of the Congressional Record in his hand. That was a stage effect

we had set up. He said, "While Mr. Voorhis has been back in Congress I've been down in the South Pacific. I've been studying the Congressional Record. I assume it's supposed to be fairly accurate." And Nixon stated, "According to the Congressional Record not one bill introduced by Jerry Voorhis has ever been enacted into law; only one resolution transferring control of domestic rabbits from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture. Therefore, I assume you have to be a rabbit to have representation in the Congressional District." The house almost came apart at the seams. I feel that this was the point at which we broke Voorhis in two, and he never was the same after that. We had him on the run from that point on out. I think from then on it was a very simple job of these coffee hours. We developed a precinct organization to do calling. We knew block by block where our favorable votes were and we made it our business to get them to the polls. I think the rest of it is history. That's the first election.

ARENA: You know, Mr. Day, I don't intend to go into detail into politics. In other words, this won't be a series of interviews.

DAY: I know.

ARENA: However, I am interested in knowing about Nixon the man and your description of him. Not necessarily a political one, but just as Nixon the person is prompting all of these questions. For example, how would you describe him as a debater? Obviously, you saw him as a political debater, but as a debater, period, how would you describe him?

DAY: I'd describe him as a very effective debater, except on the occasion when he took on [John F.] Jack Kennedy, which I told him was a mistake because he was on the defensive.

ARENA: It was in a way reversing the Voorhis-Nixon situation.

DAY: Reversing it. And I talked to him, I had lunch with him in Washington. We talked about it, and he said, "Roy, I'm a team player." Now this points out a lot about Richard Nixon. He's not a lone wolf. He's a team player. And he said, "I'm part of this administration and I feel it's my duty to defend it," whether he agreed with everything that was done, obviously he didn't. No two people agree on everything, I don't care how close they are together. But he felt he had to defend it and he felt . . .

ARENA: Excuse me, by agreeing, you mean with General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower?

DAY: Yes. General Eisenhower. Now, I met Jerry Voorhis here quite recently. I went up and made a social call. I thought it was just a nice thing to do because the last time I'd seen him was during the campaign when we clobbered him. And when I walked in he had the funniest look on his face. He lives up in Claremont. He's a highly intelligent person. It's just a case that we don't think the same. We don't agree on our theories of government. I went and called on him. He didn't know why I was there. He thought probably I was going to swarm all over him. Instead of that, we had a very friendly visit when he found out I wasn't there to sell anything, I just wanted to visit. So the only comment he made, he said, "Oh, I think President Nixon is a rather weak leader." So I asked him this question. I said, "Jerry, who is strong enough in your opinion to pull us out of this mess today?" He didn't answer me for quite a while. He didn't have anybody on the tip of his tongue among the nine, ten or twelve Democratic candidates. He finally came up with a name which I won't repeat here, because I'm not campaigning for the Democrats. But he didn't have anything unkind to say about Richard Nixon. He just tried to insinuate he was a little over his head. Well, that was an interesting reaction at this point, this late in his life. But I had a great deal of respect for Voorhis' ability and this is why I felt he was a very tough person to knock down.

I think the big mistake that Richard Nixon has made in his whole political career--and he has admitted this to me--is when he ran for Governor of California. I said, "You cannot step down to run for a political office after you've had a higher one." We've had this happen here in Pomona where a former mayor tried to step down and run for councilman. He was clobbered when he should have won easily. He was a very capable person. People have a funny, psychological reaction and get the feeling that somebody is looking for a place to light, rather than basing the office on their ability.

Now getting back to Nixon the man, which is what you really want me to talk to you about. Dick Nixon was very shy. He was very shy around women. My first reaction to him when we'd meet women was to get him to look them right in the eye. And Dick Nixon, if there's one thing about him I know, he's anything but a coward. I know that much about him. He just felt that women kind of bugged him at first, until he got used to campaigning and got into it. He was a deep thinker. I took him to a UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles] - USC [University of Southern California] football game when he was first starting in his campaign. He bought every paper on the way in he could buy. So, every time there was a time out, instead of talking about the game or what had happened, he had his nose buried in the editorial pages and the news pages of these newspapers. Then when the whistle blew and the game started again, he'd drop them and watch the game. He's an avid sports enthusiast.

He loves football, baseball, and all kinds of sports. He took me to a game in Washington when I was back visiting him. He's a very regular person, but he's a deep student of what's going on. He has a very deep burning desire to do something for this country and for the world. I really believe that the one thing this man wants to do, if there is one thing he could actually accomplish in his political career, is to bring peace to the world. I'm sure of that from my talks with him.

When we first started talking, Jerry Voorhis had been an Associate Professor at Scripps College for Women in Claremont. We invited some of the Scripps girls to come down to my home. They sat down on the floor and we gave them a coke and they just sat around and we made it very informal. They were there to throw bricks at Dick Nixon because they were well schooled by Voorhis' philosophy at Scripps. They were trying to throw embarrassing questions at him. Dick instead of directly arguing with them would say, "Well, now you have a very good point there probably." But he said, "I wonder if you couldn't accomplish this by doing it this way or that way." He would lead them around through left field, back into second base, then get them into home plate. He had a very fine knack of doing this without a direct confrontation of arguing with them, and I think as I told you before we started taping, that's one of the big problems with youth today. He made remarkable headway dealing with young people by just sitting down and talking with them.

ARENA: On this question of his being a student, you and I are aware of his splendid academic record. He won a scholarship to Duke [University] and all of that. Did you think when you first heard of him that this might be a liability in the sense that he might be too scholarly, it might be above the average voter? Did that cross your mind, and in actual practice, how did that work out from your experience? His being a studious type of person. How was he able to communicate with the average voter who is not a law scholarship winner, we'll say?

DAY: Dick Nixon, when he was with people he knew, or an informal gathering, could take his hair down, so to speak, and be just a regular as anybody.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, have you ever been uncomfortable with him?

DAY: Never.

ARENA: In a social or formal situation of any type?

DAY: Never. He's a very regular person and he can kid with you and he can be serious, but he's usually thinking. His mind is always alert. I think even when he's kidding he seems to be thinking. But he takes his hair down because I've had him in my home time and time again during a campaign, and he'd kid.

And his wife Pat is a terrific asset to him. I was asked on television in Sydney, Australia, what my opinion of her as a First Lady was, what kind of a First Lady she would make. Off the top of my head I answered the newscaster this way--the man who was interviewing me--I said, "Well, she'll never be traipsing along behind the President, she'll never be running around in front of him, but she'll always be at his side." This reporter thought that was a very good appraisal. And that's the way I feel about her. I think Pat Nixon is a very wonderful person, very high class.

ARENA: On the question, again, about the President's overall personality, character and ability on the point of the President as a speaker. I'm sure you've heard him speak many times in the beginning as well as recently. As you know, the newspapers carried the account--and I assume it's true--that he did away with his prepared speech recently in addressing a large union meeting, which will go nameless because that's not the point. The fact is, what do you think about him as a speaker from the prepared text, as compared to the speaker without the prepared text? And did you ever see him do this yourself, in the early period, do away with the prepared text and speak extemporaneously?

DAY: I've seen him divert, use both, when some question led him to get away from it, that he had to answer off the cuff. And this is where I think he excels, because his mind is so well developed and he's so well educated and trained. I don't know if it would be education so much, but rather his ability to think on his feet. This was where he clobbered Helen Gahagan Douglas. She was an actress. We walked in on her in a surprise meeting at the Beverly Hills High School auditorium. We checked into the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. They thought we were out in Arlington [California] at Sierra College. Instead of that, we'd driven in there and checked into a room. I don't know what the hotel clerk thought when I paid for the room in advance and was taking Dick Nixon in. [Laughter] And he stood over by the magazine rack looking at a magazine so they wouldn't pay any attention to him. Murray Chotiner set that up. He'd gone to the meeting and he'd taken notes on what had been said. The chairman didn't think we were going to get there. We said we didn't think we could. We never once said we couldn't, so we didn't lie about it. We said we didn't think we could possibly get back from Sierra College. So when Helen Gahagan Douglas finished her talk we knew everything she'd said, we walked down the aisle--and this was when these yellow smear sheets had been put out by the International Garment Workers against Nixon; the Senate campaign I'm talking about--so he made the remark as he was going down the aisle, he said, "I'm going to carry this yellow sheet on the outside of my briefcase so they can all see it." He walked up on the stage and she was absolutely dumbfounded.

She couldn't even answer questions. She excused herself and left. She completely fell apart up there on the stage when she saw him walk up there, because she didn't have this part in her prepared act. And he did a job on her after that, he really did. Oh, there's all kinds of incidences. As I say, when he started out he was very timid around women. He got over that. He was just kind of bashful around women. He wasn't that way around men at all.

ARENA: Did you ever meet his parents, Mr. Day?

DAY: Oh, yes. I went up and got some bacon when it was scarce around town. They used to have a store over on Whittier Boulevard and I couldn't get any bacon for awhile. I used to go over and get a pound from them every once in awhile.

ARENA: Would you describe them from your recollection?

DAY: Very fine people. His mother was a wonderful woman and his dad was, then his dad passed away. They were very proud of Richard.

ARENA: Did you see any problems--again when you first met President Nixon--knowing his background of being a Quaker, being a peace oriented religious group basically which you wouldn't ordinarily think of being an aggressive, being a fighting type of situation. And yet the President has this aggressiveness and he has his war record, did you see any complications there?

DAY: No. I can't say that I did. I think that he leans way over toward peace rather than fighting if there is any way to solve it without a fight. He thinks that way. He acts that way. And I think history is proving that. He's not afraid of a fight if that's the only way out. He's capable.

ARENA: I assume that the Quakers were a minority in the district and was that in any way a problem?

DAY: No. It didn't seem to come up in the campaigns, it wasn't any problem. I thought of it, I'll admit, but it was no problem.

ARENA: Going to the Twelfth District from the standpoint of history--not necessarily the President's personal involvement in it as a political candidate, but a background for the historian who would some day write about the overall picture--how would you describe the Twelfth District? How would you describe the conducting of politics pre-Nixon,

that is pre-1945? This Committee of 100, its means of getting a candidate as it did in the way of President Nixon, for example. Was that unusual? Had you set a precedent here?

DAY: I set a precedent with the Committee of 100, and your question brings up something. I certainly wanted to cover that I didn't think of before. I was a very firm believer that the only way to beat Jerry Voorhis was to take the campaign out of the so-called "silk stocking district" which is the San Marino area where all the money was, because they'd vote for any Republican till you got to the San Gabriel River on the east, then they were sunk up to this time. And Voorhis would win on the east. This is where he won his elections, carrying Glendora, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Covina, and all that area, and Pomona and down on the east side, because they didn't have enough votes to win over there in the San Marino area.

I met with some of their group when I first started to talk about this Fact Finding Committee. I mentioned at the start of this interview that they thought I was setting up a campaign for myself, and this is where I exploded. At a little luncheon meeting at Eaton's Cafeteria, over on Foothill Boulevard, not far from the [Santa Anita] Race Track, I told them that nothing was further from my mind, but I said, "There's one thing that's going to be hard for you people to swallow." I said, "We've got to win this campaign east of the San Gabriel River." And I said, "You people are going to have to resign yourselves to having a candidate from over here to win." And they went along with it. I made them see it. I said, "It was almost impossible to win with a candidate from that side of the river against Voorhis." Now it would probably be different because they don't have any backlog of seniority or favors to worry about.

ARENA: Would it be accurate to describe the Twelfth District as being overwhelmingly rural before World War II, '41 being the dividing line?

DAY: Yes.

ARENA: Then industry, especially the plane industry, came in and you have still, though, an overwhelmingly rural base for the Twelfth District. And President Nixon's growing up on a farm made the difference, in your opinion?

DAY: Oh, yes. We talked about that grocery store of his folks. We talked more about that than what he did, at times.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

DAY: I just hope I'm giving you something you want.

ARENA: Mr. Day, still sticking to this general historical background in which you are giving us an explanation of the setting in which the President was introduced to political life. How would you describe the main centers of political action? How would you describe the nature of political parties? You mentioned from time to time--you might have off the tape--about the idea of the smoke filled rooms. How much of that was there really, and was it the smoke filled room? Was it that type of a political leader who really ran politics in Southern California, especially in the Twelfth District?

DAY: Yes. That's the way it had been because there were a few self-appointed Republican leaders that had pretty much run the thing and unsuccessfully. That's why I got into it. I got disgusted. I thought there was something wrong here. You must play to win or not "suit up." The thing that really launched me into this whole political deal was back in '44 really, when I started with [Ernest] Geddes and I first really got my dander up a little bit about it. I said something about a candidate for Congress. A fellow named John Todd who actually was thinking about running for Congress was killed in an auto crash. He was a former mortician, the firm still exists. His sons are very active in it. I went to this political boss here--now deceased--right across the corner from us in the empty building now, and I said something about him. He said, "Why doesn't he come to see me?" For some reason or other that hit me right between the eyes and I didn't like it. I said, "Why don't you go see him?" Probably I'm like the dissidents now among some of the younger people. They all want to be a part of the thing and they want to be recognized, maybe. I wasn't any kid as far as that's concerned. I was forty-five years old at that time, but I hadn't really gotten into this thing very deeply. But I felt that we were blowing our own ball game and it was our own fault. I think that's the truth.

ARENA: How important do you think it was that it was from Whittier that the candidate came? Did that make any difference or was it the personality of President Nixon himself that was the deciding factor in your favoring him in particular?

DAY: I liked his record. He was an undefeated debater. Of course, Dr. Walter Dexter's appraisal of him on the phone went a long way with me.

ARENA: Had you known him personally, was that the idea?

DAY: Dexter? Oh, yes. Very well. Dr. Dexter was president of Whittier College.

ARENA: And you were aware that President Nixon had been a student at Whittier College?

DAY: Yes. That's why I called Dr. Dexter, because we had been closely connected in the Lions Club movement. Dr. Dexter was president of Lions International a year or two before that. And I was a district governor in this area. He spoke so highly of him, and then I found out he'd been undefeated in debates and he was president of the student body. Then I found out Dick didn't have money, that he sort of worked his way through college. This made an impression on me. Everything sounded good and was strongly confirmed. When I met him and heard him talk he was so sincere in wanting to render a service to his fellowman. Here he was in the service of his country, but he felt that people in this district deserved something better than what they were getting. He did a beautiful job of selling it. He didn't do it in a belligerent way at all. He did it in a very sound, humanitarian way, which I think is his strongest asset. I don't think rough and tumble fighting is Dick's dish at all. I think that he has to appeal to reason and the higher senses of people to sell anything. I think that's where he'll do his greatest job of selling in the long run. He has already, because I get that reaction of people I talk to.

ARENA: As you know, one of his main backers was Mr. Herman Perry of Whittier, manager of the Bank of America in Whittier. How would you describe him and his interest in politics? Was his, more or less, also that of the non-professional, the non-smoke filled room fellow, and who had the same view as you, who wanted to do something directly?

DAY: He wanted to do the same thing, except he was in a position where he couldn't go out and beat the bushes, and there was no reason why I couldn't, or I didn't have sense enough not to, maybe. I don't know which. But Herman Perry and I agreed right down the line. I have some beautiful letters commenting on the different meetings, how they were going, and so on. In the Senate campaign our last meeting was in the home of [Kenneth] Kenny Washington--you remember, the negro football star from UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles]. We had a meeting there and when Dick spoke, his classic statement was, "I had the best view of the games at Whittier College of anybody," he says, "from the bench." He always played himself down from that standpoint, but he built himself up by doing it.

ARENA: Did you know Coach or Chief [Wallace J.] Newman personally?

DAY: Yes. I met him during the campaign. He coached at Whittier for years. He was at Covina High School before that. So, I knew him when he used to clobber my own high school peers. He was a good coach. I talked to him quite often about Dick at the meetings we went to.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what problems there were for an amateur like yourself going into politics, and it turned out successfully? Thinking back, what do you think that has taught you? I know some day you might write about this in detail, but from a standpoint of just thinking out loud, what lesson do you think you obtained from that experience? This idea of not being a life follower of politics, not being the typical precinct man and political boss man, and yet winning an election.

DAY: No. I've never worked at that level. That's the funny part. Most people come up through doorbell ringing. I never did. I may set up the plan. With Geddes, here, I had bumper strips printed "Write in the name GEDDES" and I had cars parked just far enough away to be legal in almost every precinct and where the heavy vote was. Things like that. I just concocted these ideas. I don't know why. I just had a knack of thinking up ideas that would work.

ARENA: Do you think that might have been an advantage that your ignorance, so to speak, forced new ideas and some fresh air into the regular system, which doesn't only happen in politics but any system where you don't have some new ideas allowed in? I think that might have made a difference.

DAY: I think so. That's really where my whole ability lies. I couldn't even turn a press on out here and yet I can come up with ideas for the business. A funny thing happened, getting away from what we're talking about. This is a piece of the heat shield off of the first trip of the Apollo that went to the moon. They asked me to come up with the theme. In fact, I did. One was "The Great Race" and they had jalopies running up and down Second Street here. Then I had the "Olympic Games" once. They had a Russian runner and an American running in and out of the Elks Club up here in the middle of the victory dinner. Finally, the Russian was ahead to start with and pretty soon he was fagged and came in in the middle of the meeting and he came up to somebody and said, "Ah, vich vay iss Moscow?" and he gave up. And then the American brings this result up to the head table telling us we had gone over the top of our budget. Those are the kind of things I like to do. This thing, I had the mayors run a race down the mall and they ran for about a block just to get to the Buffums store out here. They'd stage a grandstand finish, and so on. That was my version of the "Olympic Games" related to our United Crusade campaign. And then, finally, I used a "Voyage to the Moon" as a theme. My young daughter and a city councilman had astronaut suits on; they came in, and I had a great big chart cut out and they put in jigsaw puzzles as reports filled the quotas. So I set up this victory banquet and I'll be darned if it wasn't the night they came down off the moon. Half of the people on that committee still think that Dick Nixon tipped me off when they were going to come down. I said, "Hell, I didn't even know when they were going to go up then, much less when they'd come down." Just

pure luck. This is the thing I have always done--Chamber of Commerce, Campfire Girls. I like this sort of thing. I just like to do it. It's a knack. I have no training, no background from my family, certainly. They were orange ranchers. It's just I seem to be able to come up with some gimmick and do it and I like to do it. I enjoy doing it. Politics is the same way. Now Dick had the education, the formal thing. Hugh Flournoy, State Controller, another protege, we're always kidding each other. He'll come up with some big word when he's getting ready to make a talk or something. I'd say, "What's that big word mean, Hugh?" I kid myself, you know, to him. He's a very close friend of mine. He calls every two or three weeks and asks what's going on in the area and what do I think people are thinking.

ARENA: Would you mind spelling the name, please?

DAY: F L O U R N O Y. Houston I. Flournoy is what it really is. He's a very intelligent person. He's a little liberal for [John H.] Rousselot, shall we say. That's it. I've handled both their campaigns. What's that make me?

ARENA: A maverick. On this question of what people think as regards to what the facts really are. Knowing again the young Nixon just on the threshold of getting into politics. That was his first office. Knowing the President today, what do you think are some of the most misunderstood--out of honesty as well as dishonesty--misunderstood facts, or misunderstood notions about Richard Nixon, the man? Thinking again, you met him very green, just as he was, never having tasted politics before, and yet there are so many notions about what the President was like, his whole life. How would you comment on that?

DAY: The thing that makes me boil is they say he's weak, indecisive. He isn't. He might be mulling things over in his mind. He thinks things through. I have a write-up here that I discovered going through my memoirs where he said he wants both sides of a problem. It's in relation to one of his campaigns. And he does. But he makes his own mind up. Henry Kissinger isn't telling him what to do in China, I'm very sure. He's probably telling him what his own attitude is, and so on, and briefing him, but Richard Nixon calls his own shots. This I know.

ARENA: Can you think of a particular incident, especially in this early period when you first met him--it's not necessary to give names--but possibly where he was advised to do something and he took it under advisement but ended doing something different because he was convinced that his way was the correct way?

DAY: Well, I'll give you one instance that's always stood out in my mind. This I've used in talks I've given on Dick Nixon. We didn't have any money in that first campaign. We had five or ten dollars from the various members of the Fact Finding Committee and that's all the money we had to start out with. When we got into the campaign Roy Crocker of San Marino got busy and raised some money--South Pasadena, I believe, he lives in. A real good friend of mine, by the way. I hope you interview him, if you haven't. He's chairman of the board of Lincoln Savings & Loan [Association]. A representative of a large utility, nationally known, came down to see me and handed me five one hundred dollar bills to put in Nixon's campaign. This is right after he'd been nominated, or shortly after. This was after thinking Nixon might have a chance after all. Nobody gave him a chance when he started. In fact, the first donation I had, which is in one of these write-ups here, was from Fred Palmer--whose name I can use--chairman of the board for the First Federal Savings & Loan Association. I saw him on the street here and he gave me twenty-five dollars. "Well," he said, "I don't think we've got a chance but we have to keep up the fight." I've quoted him time and time again. He doesn't care. He thinks it's very funny because it's the first contribution to the campaign. But this man came down and handed me five one hundred dollar bills. So, I went to Richard Nixon. This man wanted to be sure that I told him where they came from, which I did. Dick looked at them a minute and he said, "Roy, you give these back to him and tell him if he wants to contribute to my campaign turn it in to the treasurer of the campaign, and I don't want to know where it came from." This was a railroad. I won't go any further than that. This told me more about Richard Nixon than any one single thing. I've used that in talks, too, which I'm sure is all right to use. This tells about the character of the man. Now, who in the devil else would have turned down five hundred dollars when we didn't have that much in the whole campaign at that point. I'll guarantee they gave five hundred to Voorhis, too, in the same campaign. I'm sure they did, because that's the way they play, a lot of them. They want to be on the winning side, no matter who wins. But they began to realize that maybe this Nixon had a chance. He came all the way from San Francisco [California] to personally give it to me, so he'd be sure it got to Nixon in person. It did, and he gave it back to me just about as fast. Now, that's along the line I think you're interested in.

ARENA: Yes. Do you recall if the Nixon family and connections such as the Milhouses were known at all? What I'm trying to get out at this point, did anyone know of the Nixons or Milhouses before this period, in Pomona or the district as a whole?

DAY: No. Nobody had heard of him. Herman Perry is the one that really gave me his name. Then I talked to two or three over there that knew him as a student or young

attorney. Really, Herman Perry is the one that almost alone, unaided, gave me the tipoff on it. He told me about him. When we got him out here we got support in a hurry. No, the family was frankly no help to him, because they had no particular base of operation in this regard. They were just simple, nice, good country grocery store operators. They had no prominence. I would say they couldn't give him any shove, but they certainly didn't hurt him any either. I mean they weren't engaged in anything that could ever hurt him, let's put it that way, too.

ARENA: Again, I'd like to ask you a question that only a person such as yourself could answer--one who grew up in this area, who knew the President on the eve of getting into politics, and who has known him since, firsthand. What was there in the rural life of a district such as this, overwhelmingly farm, what was there that could lead to a person becoming a President of the United States? In other words, here the United States is now famous because of its really industrial power and farm products certainly help. But it's mainly a great and wealthy power because it's a great independent, industrial power. And the President's background had practically none of that. He was not a big city boy at all. He visited the city but he was certainly a rural boy in every sense of the word. Why do you think a person who comes from such a background--not a famous family at all, by the way, but a hard working average family in a way--what qualities or what opportunities does this type of an environment, a small rural farm environment, give to a man to enable him to develop leadership qualities to rule one of the greatest powers in the world, the world has ever seen?

DAY: I think the first thing I would say off the top of my head in answering your questions, you develop self-confidence because you have to to get anywhere. In other words, if a young man coming along has everything handed to him he seldom becomes really self-reliant. He has no goal to achieve. But somebody starting with a good education, having the basic background, the basic ingredients, certainly would have the desire and incentive to go where he has gone. Yet, being on his own, I think his Navy experience was a great help to him, and renegotiating these Navy contracts, which was really his law experience, about the sum and substance of it really.

ARENA: Excuse me. Were you possibly one of his clients anywhere along the line, in law?

DAY: No. I never knew him till they got him out here to get a look at him as a possible Congressional candidate. I listened to him for about twenty minutes and looked at him intently, as I always study facial expressions related to spoken words. Next thing, when he came out here, was to get him

into a pair of shoes that would fit him and a dark suit, or a light gray suit. They got one out of the basement over here at the John P. Evans store. Couldn't even get clothes for this man. He had feet about this long. [Laughter] I don't know whether anybody's told you that or not.

ARENA: No.

DAY: Oh, he has real long, big feet. I think he wears about a twelve or about that.

ARENA: He was in uniform at the time, and the idea was for him to be seen as a civilian, for political reasons.

DAY: Oh, yes. Yes, at this kick-off here at the Ebell Club he was still in the Navy. Then he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander before he got out. He was a Lieutenant at the time he came into political view. People were impressed with his sincerity and they knew he had the intelligence, the basic background that they receive over at the institution that you're connected with. And he did something with it. He didn't just go through it because his folks wanted him to go to school.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you this, along those same lines: Knowing the rural community as you do, knowing the city as you do--of course, you have the nearby one of Los Angeles--would you say that there really isn't that much difference from the standpoint of a youngster growing up, that the city doesn't overwhelm the country people, especially in this type of a setup?

DAY: I don't think so.

ARENA: Or is Southern California different? Is the farm and rural situation here different? And does that make a difference, compared to other situations where you have a farm, we'll say, outside of New York City? Possibly, the rural situation in Southern California is closer to what's going on in the city because of the newspaper contact, because of the rapid mobility back and forth of the rural people here with the city of Los Angeles. And that's mainly a question, not a conclusion. You'd know better than I the relations over the years between the rural people outside Los Angeles and the city of Los Angeles itself. Are they different worlds or not?

DAY: Well, I think that the person living outside of that closely knit perimeter of the city has an advantage.

ARENA: And you would consider this outside the closely knit perimeter?

DAY: Yes, I do. Pomona's gradually being swallowed up but we're not swallowed up yet.

ARENA: But it was not at that time, as the President has brought out, and he grew up definitely outside the perimeter.

DAY: Oh, yes. I feel--and this is just my opinion, I have nothing to base this on particularly because I never lived in a big city and I don't want to--I feel that you're probably smothered by your surroundings of the city. It might be harder to identify yourself or become, say, an individual in the city. Whereas, here, I think you have some opportunity or more opportunity to pick your destiny and work towards your destiny because you don't have as many people to wade over, closely knit and fencing you in. I have the reaction that in Los Angeles you'd feel so smothered if you lived in there and grew up in there. Here, I feel you have room to breathe, such air as it is. If you want to amount to something you still have an opportunity to do something about it. It's easier to do it here than it would be in there.

ARENA: Was there anything in the President's background, especially when you knew him personally, that suggested that he would have this interest in international affairs? I'm thinking, in particular, that one of his first assignments was the Herter Committee which involved the Marshall Plan, which is history. Did that come to you as a surprise that he would be so actively, and it turns out successfully, engaging in such important international questions, from the beginning right up to the present time?

DAY: I know that [Christian] Herter was a very good friend of Dick's. They were very close. Evidently Herter sized Nixon up as a type of person with the potential and the ability to do the job. He saw something in Dick Nixon that was there, because that was really his springboard right there.

ARENA: Do you ever recall the President bringing up to you--especially at this initial period--if he had the idea of going into politics before meeting you, before coming out for that Twelfth District campaign? Did he mention if he had ever had the idea of going into politics, one; secondly, why the Republican Party?

DAY: I think he believed in the Republican platform as such, and he believed in our policies. Going back to the days of the tariff and so on, that he basically believed in the Republican policy.