Interview with Newton Minow

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Good morning. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the director of the oral history program at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois. Today I'm in Chicago, Illinois, at the Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law, sitting across from Mr. Newton Minow. Good morning Mr. Minow.

Minow: Good morning, Mark. I'm very, very pleased to be here to do this.

Newton Minow

DePue: Well, I'm delighted to have the opportunity. When I heard about this, I said, "Boy. I'm going to sign up to do that one. No problem at all." This is kind of a rarity, as the oral history director for my program. We're doing a collaboration with two other institutions. One obviously is with Northwestern, and the other is with the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, which is quite a mouthful, but they have a lot to be proud of. They all want to have an opportunity to talk to you.

Now, the reason we're doing this, and the reason I'm sitting across from you, Mr. Minow, is that, as you've expressed, you've done lots of these interviews before. I'm going to run through a few, then you can tell me the ones that I've missed. Obviously, the Kennedy library, the LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] library, the American Jewish Committee, one on the history of cable TV—which is a natural, given your background—the Chicago History Museum, and the University of Illinois at Chicago on Mayor Daley. What else have I missed?

Minow: I think, Columbia University for the Carnegie Foundation, and I think there've been a couple more, but at my age you can't remember everything.

DePue: Well, I think it was a great idea when you said, "All these people want to do an interview with me. Why don't you all get together and sit down and do one interview?" Again, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity. I always like to start off with the basics. Just tell us briefly where and when you were born?

Minow: January 17, 1926 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. By coincidence, one of your other interviewees, Judge Abner Mikva, and I were born four days apart in the same hospital.

DePue: Did you know each other growing up?

Minow: (laughs) Very much so. We went to high school together. We were lifetime friends.

DePue: That's amazing. Most of us don't have that kind of connection. What an amazing person he was to interview as well.[1]

Minow: He was remarkable. He died on July 4 of last year, 2016. I spoke at his memorial. There's a well-known story. When he first went into politics, he volunteered at the Democratic headquarters in his neighborhood in Hyde Park. The Democratic regular politician had a cigar in his mouth. He said, "Who sent you?" Abner said, "Nobody." Without taking the cigar out of his mouth, the politician said, "We don't want nobody nobody sent."

DePue: That's a classic story of Chicago politics.

Minow: Well, I said when he died—he died on July 4—and he arrived at the pearly gates, the committeeman up there said, "Who sent you?" Abner said, "Nobody." The committeeman said, "Well up here we don't care if nobody sent you. What's your name?" He said, "Mikva." He said, "Would you spell that?" "M-i-k-v-a." He said, "I'm going to google you." He googled him, and he said, "I see you were a congressman, and you were a judge, and you were in the White House. There were two other guys who died on the 4th of July, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. They've invited you to dinner, so come on in."

DePue: What a great way to finish that story. Thank you very much. Tell me just a little bit, briefly, about growing up in Milwaukee.

Minow: It was during the Depression. My parents both were brought to the United States as small children by their parents, who were immigrants. War was looming. One thing was that they had a great public school system, and I got an excellent education at Washington High School, the west side of Milwaukee. My father was in business. My mother was a volunteer and a homemaker. I had an older brother, Burton, who was physically handicapped

[1] See Mark DePue's interview with Abner Mikva, a multi-session interview conducted beginning in the summer of 2014.

from birth, and a younger sister. We had, looking back, a very ideal childhood and a happy life. While I was in high school, Hitler invaded Poland. The war started. As a senior, I enlisted in the army and ended up as a sergeant in an engineering unit in the China-Burma-India Theater.

DePue: You enlisted as a senior? Does that mean you didn't finish high school?

Minow: I missed the graduation, but I was there until a couple of weeks before graduation.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about what you did. You said India, right, as an engineer? What were you working on there?

Minow: Our unit mission was to build the first telephone line connecting India and China. [It] ended in Kunming, China, and it was through Burma, through what was then called Burma, now Myanmar, the Burma Road. We finished that job in the spring of '45; my assignment was very lucky. I was at the theater headquarters in New Delhi, India, running the switchboard. We were told we were going to be going to Japan for the invasion. But then the atomic bomb was dropped, and the war ended, fortunately.

DePue: What did you think about Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb?

Minow: Well, thinking back about it, it was a horrible thing. But I think it quickened the end of the war, and that was the most important thing. Morally, I never understood the difference between dropping an atomic bomb and dropping 500 other big bombs. Morally it was the same.

DePue: It's oftentimes overlooked that the firebombing of Tokyo probably took more lives than—

Minow: Absolutely. But then I came home. Before I went in the army, I had applied for admission at Harvard. I didn't know anybody who'd gone to Harvard or anything about it, but I had applied. When I came home, I called Harvard and said, "I'm back. Is my admission still good?" They said, "Yes, but we want to warn you, we can't provide any housing for students. We're putting up some tents and Quonset huts." I said. "I'm sorry. I've been there and done that the last few years." My dad suggested I apply to Northwestern. I did and came here and loved it.

DePue: Did you know, by the time you've finished up your time with the army, what you wanted to do with your life?

Minow: No. I think it was probably because of the war, I was very interested in politics and government and doing everything possible to avoid another war.

DePue: When did you arrive at Northwestern? When did you start school?

Minow: It was the summer of '46.

DePue: You didn't waste too much time.

Minow: No. Then I did a very foolish thing. I was trying to make up for what I regarded as lost time, and I raced through summers, went to Northwestern Law School on an accelerated program, where you could get through in twenty-nine months. Looking back it was really idiocy. I shortchanged my education. I got out of law school in the spring of 1950, which is the same time I would have gotten out of law school, had I never been in the army.

DePue: You went through both undergraduate and law school in twenty-nine months?

Minow: No, the law school was twenty-nine months, but your first year of law school counted as your last year of college. So, between starting in the summer of 1946 and then ending up in 1950 was four years for both college and law school.

DePue: Then you go, "Phew!" (Minow laughs) Then you've got to take the law exams.

Minow: We then took the law exams. Then I got a very lucky break.

DePue: Well, before we get there, Mr. Minow, one other question, because apparently you were not spending all your time in the books while you were in college.

Minow: No.

DePue: You had a chance to meet a young lady by name of Josephine Baskin. Is that right?

Minow: Yes. I met her actually at Evanston, [Illinois] as an undergraduate. We fell in love [and] got married while I was still in law school. We got married in 1949. In fact, two days ago we celebrated our 68th wedding anniversary.

DePue: Congratulations.

Minow: Thank you.

DePue: That's amazing.

Minow: Well, we've been very blessed.

DePue: One other quick question. Did you go to school on the GI Bill?

Minow: Yes I did.

DePue: What's your opinion about the GI Bill, how important that was in American history?

Minow: I think there were three laws that changed America for the better. One was in the very beginning of our country, where we created the Northwest Ordinance and created public schools. One was the Morrill Act, which created the land grant colleges. The third was the GI Bill. They all educated the nation and gave us a chance for a free, prosperous, wonderful country.

DePue: What was it about the law that appealed to you? Why that profession?

Minow: I didn't know very much about it. Two of my father's brothers, two of my uncles, were lawyers, but I don't know that that had a big impact on me. I think it was because the law and government were essential to each other, and I was fascinated by that.

DePue: I would imagine that like most graduates, maybe all graduates, you were somewhat idealistic about the future. What did you hope to accomplish as a lawyer?

Minow: In the Bible, in Deuteronomy, in the Jewish Torah, it says, "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue," justice. I think that was a very major part of it. I wanted to be a lawyer, and I wanted to also participate in the political and governmental functions of society.

DePue: Mr. Minow, I cut you off before. What happened then after you passed bar? Where did you go next?

Minow: I got a great job with a fine law firm, Mayer, Meyer, Austrian & Platt, in Chicago. I started there. A few months into that, the law school called me and said that a law clerk for Chief Justice Vinson at the Supreme Court of the United States…Dan Walker, who had been roughly a semester ahead of me at law school, he'd been called back to the Navy in the Korean War, and there was a vacancy at the Supreme Court.

Prior to that, the law school had recommended me to Justice Minton, and I went for an interview with Justice Minton. He told me that he would like to hire young people from the Midwest. He himself was a U.S. senator from Indiana, when he went on the Supreme Court. He said he had just hired a guy named…He couldn't remember if it was Mifka or Miska? I said that was Abner Mikva, my childhood friend. Abner got that job.

Then a few months later, I got this call about Chief Justice Vinson. I got that job. Jo and I moved to Washington, and I became a law clerk. One of my fellow law clerks is my law partner today. We've been together for sixty plus years, Howard Trienens. But I became the third law clerk for Chief Justice Vinson at the Supreme Court.

DePue: This is quite a list of some of the prominent people in Illinois politics that you've already mentioned here, Dan Walker, Abner Mikva, yourself. Who else in those early years did you—

DePue: Then another lucky thing happened. One of our law professors—actually my favorite, Carl McGowan—was then the counsel to the then governor of Illinois, Adlai Stevenson number two [Adlai Stevenson II]. He came, and he had a talk with Howard, unbeknownst to me, and offered Howard the job of becoming his assistant, assistant counsel to Governor Stevenson. Howard and I car pooled back and forth to the Supreme Court every day. Howard told me about it on the way home. I said, "Are you interested?" He said, "No." He said, "I want to go back to my firm, Sidley Austin."

I told my wife about it. Jo said, "You are looking for something to do after you finish at the court, and you admire Governor Stevenson. Why don't you see if you could be it?" So Howard called Carl, who arranged for me to be interviewed by Governor Stevenson, and I was interviewed.

Then a wild coincidence happened. Governor Stevenson arranged for me to meet him for breakfast at 7:00 in the morning, and I did. I didn't read the paper or get any news that day. He interviewed me. Then I took him to his next appointment. He said to me at breakfast, "Now, if I offer you this job, is there any reason why you wouldn't take it?" And I said, "Well, my current boss, Chief Justice Vinson, is rumored to be President Truman's choice to be his successor and the Democratic candidate for president." I said, "If the chief justice decides to do that, and he asked me to stay, I would want to stay with him." Adlai looked at me, and he said, "I don't think that's very likely."

I dropped him off, and I went to work and picked up the *New York Times*. I still have it at home in the scrapbook. The headline on the front page was, "Truman asks Stevenson to run; Vinson out." Our breakfast was the day after President Truman had called Stevenson to the White House and told him he wanted to back him for president.

DePue: Was that the summer of '51?

Minow: Fifty-two. It was the spring; it was around February or March of '52.

DePue: So, before the primary season.

Minow: No, I think Truman…I'm trying to remember. I think Truman did badly in one primary at that point. But Truman had announced he wasn't going to run. Turned out that Vinson said no, and I stayed until the end of the term. I was supposed to leave on a certain date, and I went to see the chief. I said, "You know, I'd like to go to the Democratic convention. It's in Chicago. There's nothing going on here. Would you mind if I left one week early?"

He said, "That's okay with me," he said, "but your guy's not going to get it." I said, "What?" He said, "I was with President Truman last night. He told me he's disgusted with Adlai, who he says can't make up his mind; he's indecisive. It's going to be Alben Barkley—Barkley was the vice president at that time—but, he said, "You can go."

So I went to the convention, and I met with Carl and Bill Blair and other assistants. I told them what Chief Justice Vinson had told me. They were shocked. It turned out it was true. Truman tried to get it for Barkley, but the delegates said, "No, he's too old." That opened it up to a draft, and Stevenson was drafted.

Then Adlai called me in to see me. He said, "I hired you to be my assistant in Springfield, working as governor. That isn't going to happen. If you don't want to stay; you don't have to." I said, "Of course I want to stay." So I stayed and was involved, both in Springfield and in the campaign.

DePue: That's an amazing story, with coincidences all through it.

Minow: Then on top of that, that's when I started meeting people. I became friendly at that point with Sargent Shriver, who was Jack Kennedy's brother-in-law. That led eventually to other things.

DePue: The clerkship in the Supreme Court, is that typically a one-year tour?

Minow: With the chief it was two years, and I was there for a year and a half. The chief asked me to stay on, which would have been two and a half. But I, again, was anxious to get on with my life.

DePue: Give me your impressions of Adlai Stevenson.

Minow: Adlai was, in my opinion, a superb governor. He would have been a superb president. Everybody said he's indecisive. He was completely decisive on issues and had a strong moral force on issues. He was indecisive sometimes about his own career and what he should be doing for himself. That part of it was true. He ran a magnificent campaign, against hopeless odds. There was no way he could conceivably beat Eisenhower.

After he lost, I went back to my law firm. A year or two into that, he called me and said, "I'd like you to come out to see me, and spend a day with me at my farm in Libertyville." I went out there. He said, "I'm going to ask you to do something. If I were your father, I would tell you not to do it, but I'm not your father." He said, "I'm starting a new law firm, with two people you know." [They were] Willard Wirtz, who was a professor of Northwestern Law School, my professor, and William McCormick Blair Junior, whom I knew from Springfield. "We'd like you to join us."

I thought it over [and] again talked to my wife. I knew it was a risky thing, but Adlai had said to me, "If you want some adventure, come with us." So I joined him. Then when '56 came, I strongly urged him not to run for president again. I knew it was hopeless. He was invited…Again, this is, I think, a very important story.

Lyndon Johnson had a heart attack and was recovering in Texas. He was majority leader of the Senate. President Eisenhower had a heart attack. I think he had it out of town somewhere. Adlai was scheduled to go to the University of Texas to give a speech and was to spend the night at LBJ's ranch. Bill Blair, who usually traveled with Adlai, was sick, so Adlai asked me to go with him. Because of all the things going on with Eisenhower and Johnson, the press was all over us. Adlai gave his speech.

Then we rode to LBJ's ranch with Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House. Got there and LBJ said, "We're not going to stay in the house tomorrow, because all the national press is here. They think we're plotting how to take over the country, with President Eisenhower sick. We'll be out in the morning, 6:00, where everybody can see us."

We spent the day there and, of course, on the way home, Adlai and I were flying back. Adlai said, "Lyndon and Sam told me that if I want the nomination next time…" This was in the fall of '55. "If I want the nomination next year, I'll have to run in the primaries." I said, "Well, they're right." I said, "If Eisenhower doesn't run, you'll have every Democrat in the country wanting to become president." At that time it didn't look like Eisenhower was going to run. He said, "Well, I'm not going to do that." He said, "I'm not going to run around like campaigning for sheriff at the shopping centers." I said, "Well if Eisenhower runs, you should forget about it. There's no way you could win."

Well, Eisenhower recovered, ran. Adlai ran in the primaries, going to the shopping centers, and he lost again, but this time by a much bigger margin than the first time. That's what happened. Then I went back to the law firm. Bill Blair and I tried to get Adlai to endorse Kennedy; it failed.

There's one other interesting thing that happened. After he lost in '56, he was invited to give the Gridiron Speech in Washington. He took me. There was a small dinner party the night before. It's the first time I ever met Jackie [Kennedy]. I had met Jack, but Jack and Jackie were there. We called him Jack at that time. He was not that different in age than I was, same generation. So he came over to me, and he said, "Newt, I want to thank you for helping me get the vice presidential nomination at the convention." I said, "It's a good thing you didn't get it." And he said, "You're right."

I said, "You know, if you're still interested, I think you could get the vice presidential nomination next time." He looked at me, and he said, "**Vice** president? **Vice** president?" He said, "Are you nuts?" He said, "I'm going to run for president." I said, "You're the one that's nuts." I said, "You're thirty-nine years old." He said, "If I'm ever gone to be president, it'll be next time."

DePue: A couple more questions on your association with Stevenson. What exactly were you doing in these two campaigns, '52 and '56?

Minow: Well in '52 they called me the governor, because everybody else was gone. They were traveling all the time. I had a prison riot I had to deal with. I was twenty-six years old. The legislature was not in session, but I had to deal with all kinds of things. And then I particularly worked with the speechwriters. My job was to get them housing, get them secretarial help and so on. That's when I got to know Arthur Schlesinger, Jr[2]., because Arthur and I lived together at Carl McGowan's house. Got to know John Bartlow Martin[3] and a bunch of the

[2] An historian whose more than 20 books shaped discussions for two generations about America's past A provocative, unabashedly liberal partisan who, most notably, served as a speechwriter in the Kennedy White House

[3] A journalist, author, diplomat and 1937 graduate of DePauw University who served as U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic during the Kennedy administration and earned a small measure of fame when FCC Chairman Newton Minow introduced his description of television as "a vast wasteland" into the nation's vocabulary."

other, kind of Galbraith[4]…a bunch of the other people. I was working with the speech people.

DePue: You started by saying that you were essentially the governor while the governor was out.

Minow: In the case of the prison riot, I called Adlai and said, "I think you better come back." He did, and he went to the prison, and it ended. But other than that, whenever there was something important, I'd call. Basically, government slowed down for those couple of months.

DePue: You mentioned you were working with the speechwriters. I would have thought the speechwriters were on the campaign trail with him.

Minow: Some were and some weren't. Some were back. They alternated.

DePue: I know he [Stevenson] inspired that generation. Obviously he lost in a fairly significant way, but he also inspired a generation of other young politicians, didn't he?

Minow: There's no question. His idealism and his leadership became, I think, the essence at that time of the idealism of the Democratic Party.

DePue: What were your own personal political views at that time?

Minow: I was not a Democrat. I was an Independent. Adlai made me a Democrat, but I was basically not partisan. I'm still today…Although I'm a Democrat, I hate partisanship.

DePue: You spent your life working in an increasingly partisan world.

Minow: Yes and I'm very disappointed with it. I think that our current 2017 situation is despicable.

DePue: Maybe you just answered my next question, but I'll ask it anyway. At that time, or is there any time, that you seriously considered throwing your own hat in the ring and running for office?

Minow: When I came home from being the chairman of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission], Mayor Richard J. Daley was the mayor. He called me and invited me to lunch. He took me to the Empire Room of the Palmer House, just the two of us. He had a lot of questions about what was going on in Washington and the Kennedys. We had a good talk.

Then he said, "Are you interested in running for office?" I said, "No, Mayor, I have no interest in that." He said, "Isn't there any public office that you'd like to have?" I said, "Well as long as you're asking, I would love to be a delegate to the Democratic convention." At that time they were picked in the

[4] John Kenneth Galbraith, OC was a Canadian-born economist, public official, and diplomat and a leading proponent of 20th-century American liberalism. His books on economic topics were bestsellers from the 1950s through the 2000s, during which time Galbraith fulfilled the role of public intellectual.

backroom by the mayor. He groaned. He said, "Ugh, everybody wants to be a delegate." He said, “Are you sure? How about governor, senator?” I said, “No, Mayor, I have no interest." Well, he didn't quite trust me. He made me an alternate delegate, which I read about in the newspaper. Later I did run, and I was an elected delegate at a number of conventions. But I had absolutely no interest in running myself.

DePue: Those were the days of Mayor Richard J. Daley, the slate makers, basically going down the ballot and picking everybody and then getting the machine to run behind you. What was your impression of Mayor Daley?

Minow: Well I met Richard J. in Springfield, because he was in Adlai's cabinet. He was in charge of revenue for the State of Illinois. So I knew him from the Springfield days. He asked Adlai to help him when he first ran for mayor in ‘55. I helped then, and I got to know the Daley family. I liked and respected Mayor Daley.

DePue: Well, I'm a representative from the Abraham Lincoln President Library and Museum, so I’ve got to ask you this question, based on some information I ran across. I don't know which campaign it was, but apparently there was a time that you and Robert Kennedy were in Springfield and visited the Abraham Lincoln home.

Minow: In ‘56, after Jack Kennedy didn't get the vice presidential nomination but certainly had in mind a national future, the family assigned Robert to become part of the Stevenson campaign staff in ‘56, because they wanted him to learn about a national campaign. Because Robert and I were the same age, we frequently ended up together as roommates.

We got to Springfield, got off the plane. Adlai was giving a speech. Bob said to me, "You and I’ve heard that speech 5,000 times." He said, "How far is Abraham Lincoln's house from here?" I said, "It's a walk. We can get back and forth within ten minutes." He said, "Let's play hooky; take me over to show me Lincoln's house." So, the two of us went over to Lincoln's house. At that time it was not as it is today, when it was fixed up and with a fence around it. I showed him Lincoln's house.

We’re walking back, and Bob said to me, "You know, when I was a child," he said, "I thought there were three great influences on a child, home, school, church. Now, in my home with my kids, I see there's a fourth. It's the television set." He said, "My kids are fascinated. They’re watching television too much." So, I told him that I was the lawyer for the Encyclopedia Britannica Film Company, which made educational films. So, from time to time, I’d send him or loan him one, send it in the mail. He showed it to his kids on Saturday morning and sent it back. These were films shown in school. Bob remembered that.

Then, when Jack was elected in ‘60, Sarge Shriver called me the next day. He said, "The president-elect wants you to come into the government." And I said, "I can't do it. I can’t afford it, can't do it." He asked me to help him with the recruiting process, which I did. Somehow Sarge learned that I was

interested in television, and Bob knew I was very interested in television. So they asked me to become chairman of the FCC. I was thirty-four years old.

I told this to Adlai, and he said, "No." He said, "You must have misunderstood it. Thirty-four years old, they're not going to ask you to be chairman of the FCC. Besides," he said, "I want you to stay here and keep the law firm going, because when I'm through at the UN, I want to come back, and I want it to be life as it was before."

DePue: And the law firm again that you were at was—

Minow: Yeah. We were then the Chicago office of the Paul Weiss firm in New York, which is, still today, a great firm. I was doing very well in the firm. I said, "Yeah, but chairman of the FCC, this is something that I'm very interested in." Adlai said, "Well, you have to make up your own mind, but I hope you don't do it." I accepted, and Adlai gave a talk. He said, "I'm so sorry I have only one law firm to give to the country" because all four of us went in the government. Bill became—

DePue: Why didn't he want you to be the chairman of the FCC?

Minow: Adlai?

DePue: Yes.

Minow: He wanted me to stay in Chicago with the law firm, as simple as that.

DePue: He had **selfish** reasons?

Minow: Well, I understood. But it all started, I think, in that walk from Lincoln's house. I told the Kennedys, when they asked me to do this…I had no money, and the job paid $20,500 a year. I said, "I can stay for two years." Two years to the day I called the president and said, "I'd like to see you." I walked into the president's—he saw me within a day or two—into the president's office.

The president said, "I know what you want. You want to go home." He said, "You're the one guy I brought here who never has asked to see me." I would see him periodically at events, but I never once asked to see him. He said, "You want to go home." I said, "That's right." He said, "You don't want another job here?" I said, "No, I can't afford it." And I said, "I've got a job, which had nothing to do with the FCC. That's the only kind of job I will take, and it's back home." So he said, "Will you stay until I get a replacement for you?" I said, "Of course." Well, that took six months. I'm sorry I did that.

DePue: Sorry that you—

Minow: Well, he got killed within…and I'm sorry I left.

DePue: Tell me about that day, 1963, November '63.

Minow: I never got over it. I'm still not over it. When the White House called me to tell me that President Obama was going to give me the Presidential Medal of

Freedom, I said, "What's the date?" They said, "November 22nd." I said, "You know that's the day JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] was killed." Whoever called me didn't know that. It's still in me. It was one of the great tragedies of our time.

DePue: I want to spend a few more minutes talking about that experience. Let's start with this question. Did you have to go to congressional hearings to get approved as the—

Minow: Yes and I had the benefit of having two esteemed senators from Illinois at my side, Senator Paul Douglas and Senator Everett Dirksen. It was a Democrat and a Republican.

DePue: They were both heavy hitters at that time.

Minow: Yeah they were, both of them, and both of them supported me. In fact, Senator Dirksen, whom I had never known, was extravagant in his praise for me. So it was a surprise to me.

DePue: Remember any of his comments about you?

Minow: Not specifically, but I had a lot of experience with him later, when I was in the government.

DePue: Any stories there, Mr. Minow?

Minow: Well, one day I was at the office, and Senator Dirksen called me. He said, "My friend, Newt," he said, "I would like to come to see you today, but I'm chained in my office, because there are a lot of things on the floor, and I can't leave. Would you mind, at the end of the day, coming over to my little hideaway office, just off the Senate floor?" I said, "I would be glad to, Senator Dirksen."

I called the staff in, and I said, "What does Senator Dirksen want to see me about? [There] must be something going on in Illinois he's interested in." They said, "Well, there's a problem with a television station in Springfield. The guy that owns it is a friend of Senator Dirksen. Augie Meyers is his name." I said, "What's the problem?" They said, "Well, they violated some rules or something. It's in a hearing. You can't talk about it with the senator." I said, "Why's that?" They said, "The process is in a judicatory hearing. It's like a judge, so it's *verboten* for you to discuss it with anybody." I said, "Fine."

I go to Dirksen's office. He's got this little hideaway office. He says, "How about a drink?" He pours me a bourbon. We sit down. We talked a while, and I could see this isn't just a social visit. Then he says, "I want to talk to you about a little problem in Springfield." He starts to tell me about it. I said, "There's an important subject. I'm not allowed to discuss that with you." He said, "Oh come on. You're from Illinois. I'm from Illinois. Let's talk about this." I said, "I'm sorry." I said, "I don't want to get you in trouble. I don't want to get myself in trouble, cannot discuss it. It's in a state of judicatory hearing, and we're not allowed to…We're like a judge. We can't do that." He said, "Ah,

come on." He said, "All right, if you want to be that way, let me give you a hypothetical case." (both laugh) I still wouldn't talk about it.

We remain friends, but I wouldn't talk about it. Then I went to one event I never forgot, where he was giving a speech. He was giving advice to people about how to get along in Washington. He said, "Always stand on principle. Always stand on principle, and your first principle is be flexible." (both laugh) But I loved him.

DePue: He's one of a long, colorful cast of characters from Illinois politics, isn't he?

Minow: He was, and he was a good friend to me.

DePue: A little bit more. This happened during that 1960 campaign, which is a very memorable campaign. You've got Nixon versus Kennedy. You know where this is going…Were you involved at all with that first presidential debate in 1960?

Minow: I was involved in this way. Broadcasters were seeking to change the equal time law [equal time rule]. They were trying very hard. Adlai wrote an article for a magazine called *This Week.* It's no longer in existence. It was distributed with newspapers all over the country. The essence of the article was, we can have better campaigns for president. He described all the running around in '52 and '56. He said, "Why don't we use television and have that headline they put on for great debates?" I helped him with the article.

The Senate was having hearings on what to do about the equal time law. They called Adlai to testify. This was in the spring of 1960. Again, I'm the junior lawyer. I drafted the first draft of Adlai's testimony, in which he advocated that a certain amount of time, without charge, be provided by the networks to the candidates for television, never calling for debates, but time where they gave their opposing views. He went to testify.

In the course of that testimony, the subject of debates came up. They asked Adlai what he thought about debates. He said, "That would be a very good thing." That led to a law that was passed weeks before the first debate—imagine that, weeks before the first debate—which exempted debates from the equal time law for the presidential election of 1960 only. For that, it was an experiment.

Because of that law, we had the four Kennedy-Nixon debates. At the end of that election, the law did not change, so there were no debates in '64, '68, '72. In '76 the FCC, without Congress acting, reinterpreted the equal time law to permit debates, provided they were run by a non-broadcaster. The League of Women Voters then organized the '76 debates. They asked me to organize them, become the co-chairman. That was our involvement with the debates.

DePue: For the 1960 debates, did you watch them on TV?

Minow: Absolutely. In fact, I was with a client in California on a very important negotiation. I said to our client, I said, "Between the hours of…" whatever it was in California, I said, "I'm not going to be available, because I'm going to watch the debate." My college roommate at Northwestern, Sandy Vanocur[5], was one of the questioners.

DePue: Your whole life is just—

Minow: A series of coincidences.

DePue: Amazing.

Minow: People call me Zelig.[6] (both laugh)

DePue: Now the line on that particular series of debates is that, for people who listened to the debates on the radio, they thought Nixon won. For those who watched the debate on TV, they thought that Kennedy won. What's your view on that particular subject?

Minow: I think that's true. Nixon looked nervous, didn't look well. Kennedy had a dark suit; Nixon wore a light suit. Nixon was sallow; Kennedy looked like he was tanned. Kennedy was very confident; Nixon was not. It showed you that seeing a person was as important as what they said. At that point, it looked like Nixon was experienced; he'd been vice president for eight years. People didn't know Kennedy. Kennedy equalized it in that debate, as being knowledgeable and prepared to be president.

DePue: You have now written a book on the subject of presidential debates.

Minow: Yes. I thought it was important for the background to have all that, so I have, with my colleague, Professor Craig LaMay at Northwestern. I still serve today, after all these years, on the Presidential Debate Commission, and I've been involved with every single debate.

DePue: How important do you think debates are as part of America's political psyche, if you will?

Minow: I think they're extremely important, not only for America but for democracy. We have helped other countries. I think we've helped twenty-one countries, believe it or not, including Iran. Iran, if you can believe that, has presidential televised debates. We've helped the spread of democracy, through debates in twenty-one countries so far.

DePue: How many of those have you personally been involved in?

Minow: I haven't, but our Commission has.

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[5] Described as "one of the country's most prominent political reporters during the 1960s, Sander Vanocur served as White House correspondent and national political correspondent for NBS News in the 1960s and early 1970s.
[6] The main character in a 1983 Woody Allen film about a man who could look and act like whoever he's around and meets various famous people.

DePue: That's amazing. Any other countries that come to mind when you're thinking about being surprised that even that country is taking this on?

Minow: Well, a lot of the new countries in Africa, which had not had democracy before. They all do it differently. Sometimes you get twenty-one candidates trying to participate. It's fascinating to see how that technology is growing.

DePue: Well, since we're here, Mr. Minow, your impression of this last cycle, both the Republican primary debates and then the presidential debates.

Minow: Before I answer that, I have to say that Northwestern Law School was responsible in 1976 for the FCC's change. The chairman of the FCC at that time was a Northwestern law graduate, a Republican named Dick Wiley. The lawyer who wrote the petition, Henry Geller, is a Northwestern graduate, 1949, and I. So Northwestern Law School graduates, three of us, were responsible for changing the law on the debates.

The primary debates, I thought, were disgraceful. The broadcasters ran them, not the [Debate] Commission. They [the broadcasters] were trying to promote their own stars. Some of them had crowds that were interrupting. They were not educational; they were nasty. I did not think they contributed to an informed electorate.

DePue: Let's go back to your period as the chair of the FCC. Today that's an important position, but there are lots of other positions. I've gotten the impression that you, as the chair of the FCC, got an awful lot of attention and an awful lot of press. Oftentimes, people were referring to that speech that you gave. I guess I'll turn it over to you and let you talk about that speech and what happened in the aftermath.

Minow: It's traditional for a new FCC chairman to speak annually at the National Association of Broadcasters [NAB]. The speech was in May of '61. I knew that there would be a lot of attention paid to that speech. There had been scandals in the industry involving payola [secret illegal payments] involving quiz shows. There had been scandals at the FCC. President Eisenhower was forced to fire the chairman of the FCC. There'd been improper conduct. The place was a mess. The industry was a mess. The FCC was a mess. So—

DePue: Primarily in TV or also in radio?

Minow: Radio and TV. In Radio there was payola, where money was being paid by record companies to DJ's [disc jockeys]. The morality had sunk in both places. I knew we had to straighten it out. And I also knew that television was changing the lives, particularly of children, without much attention being paid to what it was doing.

So I used that occasion, and I had the help…When I was first appointed, my friend Howard Trienens said to me, "You know Henry Geller, who went to law school with us, used to work at the FCC. He got disgusted and left. You ought to call Henry. See if you can get him to come back with

you, because then you'll have somebody who knows the territory." So I called Henry, and Henry did come back. He was a huge help to me.

I had John Bartlow Martin, one of the best speechwriters in the world, who offered, as a friend, to do a draft of the speech for me. He didn't know what had happened. He watched television for twenty-four hours, and he said it was a "vast wasteland of junk." I crossed off the "of junk." I paid no attention, but the two words "vast wasteland" registered with the country, got an enormous amount of attention.

The other thing I wanted to do was promote public television. I had gone to Washington from Chicago, where we had a public television station. JFK had gone to the White House from Boston, where there was a public television [presence]. To our amazement, there was no public television station in Washington, none in New York, none in Los Angeles, none in Philadelphia or around the country. I was determined to get that going.

DePue: What did you think public television was going to be able to do differently or better than commercial TV was doing?

Minow: I thought that there had to be a service, as in other countries, that was not commercial, that was not driven by advertising, that was educational and informative. Particularly, I wanted something for children.

We succeeded. I had three pieces of legislation. All three passed. In fact, one night at home, President Kennedy called me. He said, "How in the hell did you do that?" I said, "My bills are not partisan. I run a bipartisan agency. I totally stay out of any partisanship, and I get as much support from the Republicans, as I get from the Democrats. That's just the way we do it." He said, "I wish I could do that." I said, "Well you've got a different set of issues." I said, "Our success has been staying out of any partisan fights." We have the communication satellite legislation[7], the all-channel bill[8], which led to UHF [ultra-high frequency]. That really created the Public Broadcasting System. In addition to that, we passed a bill for the first federal funds to help communities build a public television station. That all began.

DePue: I wonder if you could explain a little bit more the impact of those pieces of legislation.

Minow: The all-channel bill meant that…At that time there were VHF [very high frequency] channels from one to thirteen. That was dominant. Most television sets didn't have a tuner for the channels that were available from fourteen to eighty-three. We passed a law, which was a very unusual law, that said, "If you're going to manufacture a television set, it must have a UHF tuner," must, no ifs, ands and buts. And I got the industry to go with us. The industry was

[7] The Communications Satellite Act of 1962 was put into effect in order to deal with the issue of commercialization of space communications. This act, signed by President John F. Kennedy August 31, 1962, was very controversial and was left very open-ended.

[8] The All-Channel Receiver Act of 1962 (ACRA), commonly known as the All-Channels Act, was passed by the United States Congress in 1961 to allow the Federal Communications Commission to require that all television set manufacturers must include UHF tuners.

divided, but there were at least…Like Zenith was with us. RCA was with us. Some of them were not. That led to multiplying the number of choices of television stations by the hundreds.

Second, the communication satellite thing. We were in a mad race with the Russians. There was an old-time commissioner on the FCC who came to see me the first day I was on the job. He said, "You know what a communication satellite is?" I said, "No." He groaned. He said, "I was afraid of that." He said, "This is so important. It's the one place we're ahead of the Russians. Nobody pays any attention to this." I said, "If you'll teach me, and if you're right, believe me, we'll pay attention to it." He taught me.

He was right. We were ahead of the Russians. I testified thirteen times in Congress for the law, and we set up Telstar[9], which was ahead of the Russians. That changed everything.

Third, there'd never been any funding to help educational television. We got a small amount, to help them buy equipment, not for programming. That led to many, many smaller communities around the country building stations where there were none. Those were the three things I wanted, and I got them done in two years. I was very proud of that.

DePue: Obviously, you thought these pieces of legislation were important, but did you have an understanding, at that time, of the impact that they were going to have on American society?

Minow: I did not. I did not. I knew it would change, but I had no idea how it would totally change things.

DePue: You're talking about an age…When you got into office, how many networks essentially—

Minow: Two and a half, no public television. Cable also we encouraged. Cable was just in its infancy. At that time, the broadcasters loved cable, because it was taking their signal into places that couldn't be seen over the air. So broadcasters encouraged it. Then cable grew up and started programming and started doing things on its own. I believed, I still believe, that the most important role of government, in this area, was to expand choice, so the viewer had more choice. That was what we decided to do.

DePue: That choice part of the equation though has really been something only in the last three decades perhaps?

Minow: What added choice was cable, was UHF, was satellites and pay television, things like HBO, Showtime. They're financed by the viewer, rather than the advertiser.

[9] Telstar 1, the first communications satellite, was launched on top of a Thor-Delta rocket on July 10, 1962. It successfully relayed through space the first television pictures, telephone calls, and telegraph images and provided the first live transatlantic television feed.

DePue: Sometimes I think Americans don't understand the significance of important pieces of legislation like that, which could be lost in the pages.

Minow: Well, I think that's true, and as time goes on, I think more and more people…Now you've got a whole different set of issues. Now you've got the Internet, what's called "network neutrality."[10] Now it's a whole new ballgame for the current generation.

DePue: Let's go back to that speech. I don't know if you would characterize it this way, but the throwaway phrase, "vast wasteland," and then suddenly this is all coming back at you. That old adage comes to mind, that you don't want to take on the newspapers when they buy their ink by the barrel. I wonder if you felt like that, to a certain extent, after you had that speech and got the reaction that you got.

Minow: Well, the newspapers at that time were much more successful, and they hated television, because the print guys saw their advertising being taken away. So they loved what I was doing, because they perceived me, erroneously, as being anti-television. I happen to be a television junkie. I just wanted more and better television, not less.

DePue: But I imagine the TV executives and the advertising executives weren't too pleased by it all.

Minow: At that time. Later, after I went back to private life and years later, in addition to being very deeply involved in public television here in Chicago and nationally, I served on the board of a big international advertising agency, on the board of CBS. So I have seen every side of this elephant, from every perspective. It's not a matter of people being wrong. It's people seeing things differently from different angles.

DePue: Are there any particular stories that come to mind about the reaction the speech got?

Minow: My favorite was the chairman of the National Association of Broadcasters, who later became a good friend of mine, was the former Governor of Florida, Leroy Collins. He and I were standing on the platform after the speech. A man came up to me, and he said, "Mr. Chairman," he said, "I really didn't think your speech was very good." I listened, and Roy put his arm around me, and he said, "Don't pay any attention." He came back a few minutes later. He said, "I was thinking about it, Mr. Chairman," he said, "that was the worst speech I ever heard in my life." Roy said to me, "Don't pay any attention to him. He just repeats everything he hears." (both laugh)

DePue: This might be a peculiar question, but I'm wondering if your wife and your daughters agreed with some people's assessment that you were just a snob when it came to television.

[10] Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers must treat all data on the Internet the same and not discriminate or charge differently by user, content, website, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or method of communication.

Minow: They didn't; they're very polite. But a lot of people, as I say, they thought I didn't like television. That was missing the whole point. I love television.

Now, talking about the Kennedy years. I should tell you the most important thing that happened to me was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I knew something was going on. I didn't know what it was, but I got a call from the State Department. They said, "Are you going to be in town in the next few days, in a week?" I said, "I have to go to New York on such-and-such a day. I'm meeting with the European broadcasters to plan the satellite program with us." They said, "Will you leave us a number where you can be reached at every minute?" It's first time that ever happened.

At 7:00 in the morning, I was having breakfast with Frank Stanton, the president of CBS. He and I were to talk at 9:00 to the European broadcasters. We were going through the program. A waiter came up and said, "There's an important phone call for you downstairs." I went down. It was the White House. It was the Press Secretary, Pierre Salinger. He said, "There's a national emergency. We need you here immediately." [He] didn't tell me what it was, but I knew something important was going on.

So I went back. I said, "Frank, I can't stay. I have to go back to Washington." He said, "Well, I've got a car and driver downstairs. You take them. They'll take you to the airport." I got on the shuttle. I was in the White House within two and a half hours.

[I] saw Pierre. Pierre says, "The Russians have missiles in Cuba. The president is going to speak to the nation tonight, but the Voice of America[11] is being jammed by the Russians, and the president wants his speech heard in Cuba. We're told by the engineers of the Voice of America that there are six American commercial radio stations whose signals reach Cuba. We want you to carry the Voice of America, arrange that. You cannot tell the stations anything."

I said, "Yes, sir." I went to the office. I called in our senior staff. I told them. Swore them to secrecy. I said, "How do you do that?" They said, "It's not complicated. We can do that." I said, "How do you do that?" They said, "Well first," they said, "we think it's eight stations, not six. They're all around the country, in different places. We can call AT&T and have them patch a line to each of their transmitters to the Voice's transmitter." I said, "Will the stations know about it?" They said, "No." I said, "Well, let's do it." So they did that. Then I said to myself, How can we do this without telling the stations? This is not right.

So I called Pierre. I said, "You're going to have to let me do it my way. I'm going to have to tell the stations." He says, "If there's a leak, I'll kill you." I said "There won't be a leak." So I called all eight stations, and I said, "There's

[11] A U.S. government-funded international news source that serves as the United States federal government's official institution for non-military, external broadcasting. As the largest U.S. international broadcaster, VOA produces digital, TV, and radio content in more than 40 languages, which it distributes to affiliate stations around the globe. Primarily viewed by foreign audiences, VOA programming has an influence on public opinion abroad regarding the United States and its leaders

a national emergency. I do not want you saying anything about this to your news staff or anybody. I want you to be a patriot. This is not to be talked about. I want the owner of the station, and give me a number. I'm going to call you from the White House at 6:00. If the owner's not available, I want the person in charge." They said, "Okay."

There was never a leak. I went back to the White House, and Pierre and I together called each of the stations, told them what had happened, told them that at 8:00, the Voice of America signal would be coming out of their transmitter, that they should simply announce, "We have an important announcement from the White House." That's it. Pierre said, "We want you to come to the White House tomorrow morning at 7:00 to meet with…We call the EXCOMM,[12]" whatever it was.

So I went there, and the president looks at me and says, "It worked!" I said, "Good." How they knew that, I don't know. They must have had CIA or somebody on the ground. I was starting to leave, and he said, "Let's do it again tonight. Let's do it until this crisis is over." That took a week, seven or eight days. Stations all cooperated.

Then, when it was over, seven of the eight called me and said, "Where do we send a bill?" I said, "What do you mean? What kind of bill?" They said, "Well, we dropped all our revenue. We didn't take any advertising for a week." Edward R. Murrow was the head of the USIA [United States Information Agency]. I said, "You got any money for this?" He said, "No." I called Pierre. I said, "You got any money for this is?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, I certainly don't." I said, "I think they're entitled of something. Let's do this. If you let me invite them to the White House for lunch with the president, I think they'll drop it." So he did. Each of them had their picture taken, and it was a big deal.

About six months later, the president of a Catholic university in New Orleans called me. They owned one of the stations that had helped us. He said, "I'm coming to Washington. Our television station, which we own, has got some problem with the FCC. Could I come in to see you, please?" I said, "Fine." A Jesuit priest came into my office. He said, "Remember me?" He said, "Remember we helped you with the Cuban Missile Crisis?" I said, "Yes, Father." He said, "Well, you know, in view of what we did for you, I wonder if you could do something for us." I said, "I'll be glad to, Father. What is it?" He said. "Well, we got a little problem with our television station." They violated some rule or something. So I called the staff. I said, "I don't want to know what the problem is. Drop it." I'd probably go to jail if I did that today, but it took a Jesuit priest to have the guts to come to me, and we straightened that out. I always remember that.

[12] EXCOMM (Executive Committee of the National Security Council) was a body of U.S. government officials that convened to advise President John F. Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was composed of the regular members of the National Security Council, along with other men whose advice the President deemed useful during the crisis. EXCOMM was formally established by National Security Action Memorandum 196 on October 22, 1962.

DePue: Do you think, if you would do something like that today, all those stations would honor your request to keep it secret?

Minow: It's a good question. I never thought of it. I doubt it.

DePue: The other curiosity I have, have you heard any stories from Cuban emigres who heard that radio—

Minow: One. Actually it was from an American soldier. There was a guy who was at Guantanamo who told me he heard it.

DePue: It had to feel great to hear that story, I would think.

Minow: Well, it was very rewarding to me. I was very proud of the broadcasters for…It was an important public service.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the mood of the country. You're right in the middle of this with an important piece of the Cuban Missile Crisis. How would you describe the mood of the country during that week?

Minow: I think everybody was scared to death. Certainly I was. I thought this could be the end of the earth. At that time, I was on the list…a certain number of federal officials were on the list to travel with the president to some underground headquarters, and I said, "I'm not going."

DePue: That request has got to get your attention though.

Minow: Yeah. But I said, "I'm going to be with my family. I'm not going."

DePue: This period of your life was so productive. Looking back, what would you say was the thing that you are most proud of, in terms of your period with FCC?

Minow: Well, I think we restored the reputation of the FCC, which at that time…Actually a Northwestern law graduate, David Bazelon, was a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia. That's the court that most appeals from an FCC order went to. He called me one day. and he said, "Would you come up here for lunch with the judges?" I said, "Yes." Chief Justice Burger was then on that court.

They said, "We want you to know that we've tabulated the last eleven cases that the FCC was in our court, the last eleven cases. The FCC lost all eleven, and we want you to know that our experience with your agency the last few years has been terrible. We do not trust what the FCC is telling us." It was true. There was that dark period. "And we want you to know that we think you should straighten the place out." This was the judges telling me this.

As a result, I got Henry on, Henry Geller. We changed the lawyers. Also, most important, we changed what we were doing, what our policies were. And we restored the confidence of the rest of the government with us. It was terrible.

DePue: Looking back, what was it that you did to turn around the agency?

Minow: Number one, I think we started getting a lot tougher with the industry, with our policies. I think the public…The same thing was true with the Congress; it wasn't just the courts. We were regarded as being unreliable and not trustworthy. We changed our policies, and I think we were successful.

DePue: Where to, after your period with the FCC?

Minow: Well, I had decided…Thinking back about it, I think it was very foolish. In fact, I was an idiot. I'll go that far. I would only take a job that I had before I went to the government. I didn't want anybody saying, "He used the government to advance his job." I had been offered the job of general counsel of the Britannica, before I went to the government. The head of the Britannica came to see me and said, "If you ever want to leave, the job is still…We haven't filled it; the job is still there." It was a lot of money. It was $100,000 a year, instead of $20,000 a year.

DePue: In the 1960s.

Minow: Sixty-three. It appealed to me for two reasons. We were using savings [to live in D.C.]. That would appeal to me financially. It appealed to me because it had nothing to do with the FCC. Most people who left the FCC went to work either for somebody regulated…Many of them went to work for broadcasters.

So I decided to do that. That's when I went in to see the president. As I say, looking back on it…It turned out, after a couple of years, I decided to go back to the law practice, because I liked being my own boss, rather than working for somebody. Particularly because Kennedy was killed, I said to myself, "What a dummy I was. I should never have left."

DePue: Once you went back to your legal career—

Minow: My wife didn't want to leave.

DePue: She wanted you to stay with the FCC.

Minow: Yes.

DePue: Did the family like Washington DC?

Minow: Yes. We didn't like the public school system. We couldn't afford to send them to the private school. The school system was not as good as the school system here.

DePue: But it's got to be an exciting town to live in.

Minow: Very exciting. We met everybody that…We were treated royally. There was a group at the…Bob Kennedy had organized it, called the "Hickory Hill Seminar." It was some justices of the Supreme Court, some cabinet officers. They would meet once a month in each other's homes and have a speaker. One time the president had it. Bob was out of the country, and the president had it in the White House, in the living quarters.

I never forgot this, because the speaker was an authority of the Reconstruction period. His name was David Donald or Donald David, one or the other. [It was David Donald.] He was a Yale history professor. I remember exactly what he said. He said, "In terms of Lincoln's place in history, if he was going to be assassinated, this was exactly the best moment for it to happen. He had won the war. He'd freed the slaves. He'd been re-elected.

"If it had happened a couple of years earlier, people would have said, 'What a bum. You didn't know how to win the war. You couldn't hire good generals. He didn't know what to do with the slaves.' If it had happened a few years later, people would have said, 'What a bum. He couldn't deal with us reconciling things with the South or the Reconstruction period.' So if you're going to be assassinated, that was the right moment, in terms of your place in history."

So JFK's listening to this. I remember, he's sitting on a couch. He got up; he stood up. He said, "Professor, I've listened very carefully to what you said." He said, "Before I was the president, I used to participate every year in some kind of an evaluation of prior presidents, where you'd say 'This guy was a great president. This guy was a medium president. This guy was a weak one.' I used to fill that out regularly." He said, "But now that I'm the president, I see how ridiculous that is, because unless you're the president, you really don't know what the facts were, what the pressures were, what the options were. Unless you're the president, there's no way of your knowing." I never forgot that. A few months later, he's killed.

DePue: An obvious question, perhaps, maybe a stupid question, but the American public still has this fascination with Kennedy. Was that the right moment for him to be assassinated?

Minow: Well, fortunately, it was after the Cuban Missile Crisis, instead of after the Bay of Pigs[13]. So he showed what he was capable of doing. Because I knew him before, I considered him a contemporary. I didn't have that awe of [him].

I started to tell you, the day before I gave that wasteland speech, he spoke to the broadcasters, and he invited me to meet him at the White House and drive to the broadcasters' convention. It turned out, it was the day that the first American astronaut, Alan Shepard, had come back from space. So, I'm waiting outside the oval office. The president came out, and he said, "What about taking the Shepards [Alan and Louise] to the…?" He said, "I've got to take them to Congress. What about we'll take them with us to the broadcasters?" I said, "That'd be perfect." He said, "Okay, let me arrange this."

So he went back in the oval office, came out. He says, "Come on with me. I want to change my shirt. Then we'll go." He took me up to the living quarters, takes me, and he's changing his shirt. He said, "What do you think I should say to the broadcasters?" Even though I knew him, I was intimidated by this. But I said, "What you ought to say is 'The difference between a free

[13] The Bay of Pigs Invasion was a failed attempt by Cuban exiles to invade Cuba on April 17, 1961. Undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-sponsored paramilitary group, Brigade 2506, the incident is generally considered the most humiliating episode in the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who had approved the invasion.

society and an open society [is] that when we do a space shot, we invite the broadcasters. They cover it live. The whole country can see what's going on. The Russians have a space shot, you never know. It's all closed. Whether it failed, whether it succeeded, you don't know what the hell's going on.' You ought to say how proud you are that the broadcasters covered this event for everybody." He doesn't say, "Good idea." Doesn't say, "That's no good." Doesn't say anything.

We go back downstairs, and I see now LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] was in the oval office too and the two Shepards, Commander Shepard and Mrs. Shepard. So I see now we got one, two, three, four, five people to get into one car. So I figure I'll get in the second car. The president says, "No, no, no." He says, "Come on." He says, "Lyndon, you sit in the jump seat, and Newt'll sit in the jump seat, and the two Shepards will sit with me in the backseat." So we get in the car. The president is ebullient. This has been a success. You got to remember this is not long after the Bay of Pigs, which was such a disaster. So he is in heaven.

He's speaking to the Shepards, and he says, "Lyndon," he said, "you're the chairman of the National Space Council," he said, "but nobody knows that." But he says, "Lyndon, believe me, if this thing had not worked out well for Commander Shepard," (laughs) he said, "Everybody would know it." So Lyndon looks very glum, and we're sitting next to him, right, cheek-by-jowl in the two jump seats.

DePue: He's not a small man.

Minow: No. So I have a big mouth. I couldn't stop. So I said, "Mr. President," I said, "If this thing had not been a success, the vice president would have been the next astronaut." (both laugh) If Lyndon could've killed me with a look, I would be dead (laughs). I always remember that.

Then he [the president] got up to the broadcasters. He's introduced. He says, "The difference between a closed society—he has no notes—and an open society is that we invite the broadcasters to cover a space shuttle. You guys did a wonderful job, and the whole country could see it." Just perfect. He was marvelous.

DePue: It makes me reflect that a few years later—obviously he's been dead for several years—the whole nation, in 1969, is staying up late to watch the first man step on the moon.

Minow: And I've talked to Ted Sorensen[14]. Ted and I became very good friends. I talked to him later about it. He said, "The president realized…In fact, he said in one speech, he said, 'Why are we doing this? It's not because it's easy. It's because it's hard.'"

DePue: And it inspired a nation.

[14] Theodore Chaikin "Ted" Sorensen was an American lawyer and writer. He was a speechwriter for President John F. Kennedy, as well as one of his closest advisers.

Minow: That's right.

DePue: Well, let's bring you back to Chicago then. What are the circumstances in which you come back to Chicago?

Minow: Well, we came back to the same environment we had. We bought a house in Glencoe, where we had lived before. Kids at this point are all in elementary school. I take the new job. We have some money. Then my boss, Bill Benton, who owned the Britannica—he was a partner with the University of Chicago; they owned it together—calls me one day, and he said, "I owe a lot to my banker, Mr. Semenenko, Serg Semenenko, of the First National Bank of Boston. He has saved me from disaster several times. He's got a disaster now. He's the banker for Curtis Publishing, and he needs help. Would you go to meet him in New York? Maybe you've got an idea for Curtis of what to do."

Curtis owned all the magazines, the *Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal*, the major…But the magazine business was going to hell, and Curtis was going broke. The First National Bank would have lost…They had a very heavy loan. I suggested they merge with a broadcaster. I had a specific suggestion, a man named John Kluge who had Metromedia television stations. Mr. Semenenko called him, and by god, they stayed up all night. They made a deal. They shook hands. It would've saved Curtis.

Then Mr. Kluge's bankers said, "No, it's too risky." So he couldn't do it. Then I helped him for a while. He wanted me to become chairman of Curtis, which I thought about very hard. But I said, "No. I tell you what I'll do. I'll go on the board for a while, but I don't want to take that on," which I did.

That led me to be thinking what I ought to be doing. I decided I really like being independent. I like being a lawyer and like doing different things. If I continued working for the Britannica, I might have a possibility, but I'd be working really for a family, and I wanted to be independent. Maury Leibman, my old friend, had been after me for years to join him in the law practice. So I did and went back to the law in '65, built up what was a small firm.

DePue: What was the firm again?

Minow: Leibman, Williams, Bennett, Barrett & Minow. We built it up, and then we merged with Sidley Austin, my fellow law clerk, Howard Trienens. We became the largest firm in Chicago, Sidley Austin.

DePue: What I'd like to do now is to spend a little bit time talking about your continued association with Northwestern. We're sitting here in the faculty lounge, looking over the gorgeous view of Lake Michigan. I wanted to have you reflect on that relationship a little bit. Tell me about returning to Northwestern and how you reestablished that connection.

Minow: Well, Northwestern first of all honored me, gave me an honorary degree after the FCC. That was in…I don't know, '64 or five, somewhere in there. Then later Northwestern asked me to become a trustee, which I did. I had already

become a trustee of Notre Dame. I'm the first Jewish trustee of Notre Dame. Father Hesburgh asked me to do that. I'm still a life trustee of both institutions.

I became active at Northwestern, but I was very unhappy with the leadership at that time. I felt they were very provincial and ingrown and kept complaining. Then there was an opening for a new president.

The chairman of the board, Tom Ayers, called me. He said, "All you do is bitch, bitch, bitch. I'm going to give you a chance to change the university, if you want. I'll make you chairman of the search committee for the new president." I said to myself, If I do want to change things, this is the way I should do it. So I took that on, and I did my homework. I discovered that Northwestern had not gone outside for a president in 100 years and that it needed some livening up, broader view.

We did a big search. I had a search committee of trustees, faculty, staff and students. I really worked hard on that. I swore everybody to secrecy, and they kept it. We got down to two people, both outsiders. I couldn't make up my own mind. I called Father Hesburgh—I swore him to secrecy—and I said, "I got these two guys. You know both of them?" He said, "Yes." He knew everybody. I said, "Which one would you take for president of Northwestern?"

He said, "Newt, that is without a doubt the dumbest question I've been asked in the last thirty years." I said, "Why do you say that?" He said, "I don't know what you need, what you're looking for. If you tell me what you're looking for, what characteristics you want, I can tell you which of the two is likely to do that. But unless I know what you're looking for, I can't tell you." So I tell him, "I want a strong, tough manager. The place is a mess." He said, "Well, take Arnold Weber then."

We did, brought in Arnold. He cleaned house, changed everything. That led to another outsider and then another. So there've been three in a row now. Northwestern today is a far, far better institution than it was before.

DePue: You didn't mention the other candidate. I suspect that was on purpose.

Minow: Yeah. He did all right. He became head of another university. But I also joined the faculty [at Northwestern] and taught. I taught at the law school and at the Medill School of Journalism.

I also was asked by Walter Annenberg[15] to run a program for him in Washington in communication's policy. I said, "I can do that only if you make it part of Northwestern." He did; it became part of Northwestern. Then he gave us $25 million besides, and we did that. That was my other big thing with Northwestern.

[15] Walter Hubert Annenberg was an American publisher, philanthropist and diplomat who owned and operated Triangle Publications, which included ownership of the *Philadelphia Inquirer, TV Guide, the Daily Racing Form* and *Seventeen* magazine. He was appointed by President Richard Nixon as U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James in the United Kingdom, where he served from 1969-1974.

DePue: Well, this is a good opportunity to mention some of the other notable alums of the Northwestern Law School. I think even a couple of them have been professors here as well. The two that come to mind for myself are Governor Jim Thompson[16] and Senator Dawn Clark Netsch[17].

Minow: Yes. And I would add John Paul Stevens and Arthur Goldberg, the two Supreme Court justices, and Adlai Stevenson. All three were graduates of Northwestern.

DePue: Very prestigious group.

Minow: Well, this is a fine school. Howard and I have often talked about this. Howard and I both are Northwestern graduates of the undergraduate school. We both could have gone to any law school. I think we both were students who had acceptable records for law school. But we chose Northwestern for a reason. Northwestern at that time was regarded, nationally, higher than it is today, and Northwestern had an outstanding dean for decades in Dean Wigmore,[18] who was an international scholar.

When I came here, Dean Green still taught in the summer. John Paul Stevens was either just finishing when I started or had just finished. He may have been here for one semester. Arthur Goldberg who is related to my wife, my wife's cousin, was of course before us, but he exemplified what Northwestern could produce. I had professors here, particularly Carl McGowan, Bill Wirtz, Nat Nathanson, who were stellar people, Willard Pedrick.

DePue: How far back did your connection with Dawn Clark Netsch go?

Minow: Back to undergraduate school. My wife Jo and I both knew Dawn at college. She was a year behind us. Also here when I was here was Harold Washington,[19] and Gene Pincham[20] was in my class, Gene Pincham, African-American.

This is an extraordinary story. Our fiftieth law school reunion, I asked Gene to give a talk to our class. He got up, and he said, "I'm from Alabama. Because I was black, no law school in Alabama would accept me. But Alabama said if I could get into a law school in the North, they'd pay the bill. I

[16] See Mark DePue's interviews with Governor James Thompson at https://www.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/Thompson/Pages/Thompson,-James.aspx

[17] See Mark DePue's interviews with Dawn Clark Netsch at https://www.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/legislators/Pages/NetschDawnClark.aspx

[18] John Henry Wigmore was an American jurist and expert in the law of evidence. After teaching law at Keio University in Tokyo, he was the dean of Northwestern Law School, from 1901 to 1929.

[19] Harold Lee Washington was an American lawyer and politician from the state of Illinois who was elected as the 41st Mayor of Chicago. Washington was noted as the first African–American to be elected as mayor of Chicago.

[20] R. Eugene Pincham was an African-American civil rights attorney, judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, and justice of the Appellate Court of Illinois. He was also an ardent critic of the U.S. criminal justice system.

didn't know anything about law schools. I'd just gotten out of the Army, but I'd heard of the Northwest Ordinance.[21] So I saw Northwestern Law School. I figure there must be some connection between the Northwest Ordinance and Northwestern Law School. I applied, and I got in. And the state of Alabama said they'd pay for it.

"The next problem is I had to have enough money to get on the train to go to Chicago, and I didn't have it. But my mother said, 'You come with me about 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. I'll take you down to the station, and I'll show you how you'd get on the train for nothing.' I got on the train for nothing and came to Chicago."

He became the leading criminal lawyer of his generation, tried zillions of murder cases, never lost a capital case. One day I was raising money for the law school, and I called him. I said, "You've done pretty well. You ought to give me a check for Northwestern." He said, "I'll come to your office." He came to my office. He takes a bunch of hundred dollar bills out of his pocket and gives them to me. I said, "Why are you giving them to me in cash? Why don't you write a check?" He says, "In my business, Newt, we deal only in cash, and we get paid up front." He later ran for mayor. He later became a judge. That was Northwestern Law School.

DePue: Wasn't Dawn Clark also something of a trailblazer?

Minow: Absolutely. She was one of the first women… I think there were two women in my class, but Dawn was not only a woman, she was a star student. I think she was the top of her class. I think Harold Washington, I think, was in her class, I believe.

There was a U.S. senator who was here with me, Dale Bumpers. In my generation, we were almost all World War II veterans. We all had some sense of public service, all of us. And many of them went into politics, became judges and were very devoted to making this a better country.

DePue: I wonder what your thoughts are, having this experience with Northwestern especially. Looking at what's going on in education, what do you think colleges…Let's keep at the college level first, and then we'll go to a law school. What should they be teaching young people today? How should they be preparing people to be successful?

Minow: Well, I don't believe in a lot of the stuff that's going on today. I totally disagree with the unwillingness of certain groups to let other people, who disagree with them, speak on campus. I do not agree with this idea of safe spaces and all that politically correct stuff. I think that college and law school are the place where you grow up, and you deal with issues. I think Northwestern is doing fine, but I think certain other schools have [been mistaken in] renaming things, because they didn't like what somebody did at that time. I think a lot of this has gone to

[21] The Northwest Ordinance, adopted July 13, 1787, by the Second Continental Congress, chartered a government for the Northwest Territory, provided a method for admitting new states to the Union from the territory, and listed a bill of rights guaranteed in the territory.

excess. Even though I consider myself quite liberal, I hope political correctness has had its day.

DePue: I don't think it's quite had its day yet.

Minow: I think we're in the process of re-evaluating all this stuff now.

DePue: My next question, then, is how should law schools be preparing the next generation of lawyers?

Minow: I think the most important thing is that technology always races faster than law or public policy. Technology moves at the speed of light, and technology has out-raced a lot of the practices. For example, I'm very interested in telemedicine and the ability of patients to get excellent medical care through technology and maybe the doctor not even being with them in the same room. But our licensing procedures stand in the way of what technology can do.

One of my daughters is a law professor. She's the dean of Harvard Law School. I talk to her about this all the time. She said, "We see that artificial intelligence is being used now by advanced lawyers in certain ways." I think the big challenge now is going to be the technological revolution, the globalism. I see in our own law firm how things have changed. One thing I see—I don't like it at all—is that the profession is becoming less and less a profession and more and more a business. The ethical standards and the idea that you perform public service, do pro bono work, is under attack.

The same daughter is the vice chairman of the Legal Services Corporation, appointed by President Obama. There are millions and millions of people in this country who need lawyers, who need help, who are poor, can't afford to pay a lawyer. We forget that the person who created that service was Richard Nixon, because he knew that there was an obligation of lawyers to do good in the world.

DePue: That wasn't a name I was expecting you to bring up in that respect.

Minow: Most people don't know that.

DePue: I want to ask you if you'd reflect a little bit about the Newt and Jo Minow debate series.

Minow: Well, that was the idea of our current dean. Dan Rodriguez knew how interested I am in debates and my role in the presidential debates. So when they were raising money for a chair in my honor, they decided to create this debate series, which we've only had one. We're going to have another one this fall.

I had lunch with Dan the other day. We're planning what that'll be about. We made arrangements with a national organization that has the debates on National Public Radio and has a national, as opposed to a local, audience. We bring in top debaters, lawyers, to deal with some burning, immediate legal issue.

DePue: Are there any ones in the past that come to mind, in terms of the subjects?

Minow: Well, the one that we had so far had to do with criminal prosecutions, "Do federal prosecutors have too much power?" I'm very interested in one idea, and that is, "Should you have a right to get rid of false things about you on the Internet? Should you have a right of reply, as it exists currently in the law in Europe, in France and Germany, other countries? Should that come to the United States or shouldn't it?"

DePue: Are you surprised by how much discussions about First Amendment rights, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, is still very much part of the dialogue today in American politics?

Minow: Well, it is particularly now, with the current administration. And a lot of issues with the Internet, I think, are not yet resolved with social media. This is a real challenge.

DePue: Going back to how technology is ahead of—

Minow: Exactly.

DePue: …some of our ways of dealing with it. What's your hope then for the future of Northwestern Law School?

Minow: I believe Northwestern Law School will always be in the top rank of American law schools. What I hope will happen [is] that we'll continue to produce graduates who have a sense of public service, as well as the technical skills to be successful. I think we will. We get top students here. We are able, with the help of fundraising, to provide scholarships to those who can't afford it. I particularly like the combined law and business program. If I had it to do over again, that's what I would sign up for. I've enjoyed teaching here. I had one class…one year we taught…it was very interesting. We had graduate journalism students and law students at one class.

DePue: And what was the—

Minow: We're dealing with the law for media, a lot of First Amendment issues. We have the law students and the journalism students together. In fact, one of our students I see on television all the time now. He's at CNN, and he's very, very good. I hope we influenced him when he was here. Joshua Green[22] is the name.

Minow: I was waiting for the name. How about the issue of civility in the profession? Is that of concern?

DePue: Yes it is. In fact, just yesterday I watched President Trump's lawyer [Michael Dean Cohen], who is fairly a very tough, combative guy. He was on television, and he was anything but civil. Now they're investigating him as part

[22] Joshua Green is an American journalist who writes primarily on United States politics. He is the senior national correspondent at *Bloomberg Businessweek*. He is a weekly columnist for *The Boston Globe* as well. His work has also appeared in *The Atlantic*.

of all the stuff that's going on today with whether there was Russian collusion or fake media or whatever. I can see that civility is not part of his vocabulary.

Minow: What would you teach young law students, in terms of how to comport themselves?

Minow: The most important thing people don't learn is how to listen. Most people are thinking of what they're going to say next, rather than listen to what the other person says.

DePue: Here's the thread through all of this. Your time in India is communication. FCC, was obviously about communication. Even being a lawyer, it's about that rarely discussed part of communication, which is listening.

Minow: Very few people are good listeners.

DePue: Well hopefully that's what being an oral historian is about. (Minow laughs) How would you characterize how the law profession has changed during your time?

Minow: Well, technology has changed it. When I was a young lawyer, there was no such thing as a Xerox [photocopy] machine. A long-distance phone call was a big deal. There was no Internet. There was no looking up things, as we do today. It's—

DePue: People didn't walk around the street looking at their phones?

DePue: No, there were no cell phones. You know, the cell phone is amazing. It's only ten years old, ten years old, and look how it has changed America.

DePue: For the good?

Minow: Good and bad, both. People don't talk to each other, they're so busy looking up stuff on their cell phone.

DePue: Would you like for people to turn off the cell phone when they sit down in a restaurant with somebody else?

DePue: Absolutely. In fact, we insist on it with our kids and our grandchildren.

DePue: Mr. Minow, you're old school in that respect.

Minow: (laughs) Many ways I'm old school.

DePue: Last question for this morning, and then we're going to take a break. What words of wisdom would you have for the next generation of lawyers?

Minow: (pause) I would say, “The law is such an extraordinary opportunity to do good in the world that you should use what you learn to pursue justice every day of your life.”

DePue: That's a good way to finish for this morning. Thank you very much, Mr. Minow. We'll pick it up this afternoon.

Minow: Thank you, Mark.

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Newton Minow

Interview # ISG-V-L-2017-040

Interview # 2: May 31, 2017

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: This is Mark DePue. Again I'm with Mr. Newton Minow. Good afternoon, Mr. Minow.

Minow: Glad to be here, Mark.

DePue: I'm going to start with this, a question you might not have expected, but you and I talked about it earlier. You're wearing a very distinctive tie tack. Tell me about that tie tack.

Minow: This is the PT-109. That was the ship that JFK was on during World War II. It was destroyed, and he rescued some of his crew and brought them to safety. I lost the original. This is a copy, but I treasure it.

DePue: Was the original possibly a gift or a—

Minow: It was a gift. My daughter, Nell, actually got me one of the originals. She bought it from a collector. I don't let that out of the house. But this is a copy.

DePue: I can imagine why you don't let that out. One of the advantages of having an interview in the morning and then having lunch is that we get to hear all these stories that don't necessarily come up during the interview. There's one in particular I wanted to have you share that goes way back into your days when you and Abner Mikva were clerking and the connection with the Brown versus Board of Education case.

Minow: Well, the term [that] Abner and I were together was the Supreme Court term 1951-1952. Brown v. Board of Education was pending at the Supreme Court. This was the desegregation of the public schools issue. It had been pending there for a while, and it was on the docket. Whenever it came up, the judges would postpone it again.

One of the great experiences of being a law clerk at the Supreme Court is that every justice met alone with all the law clerks for all nine justices for lunch, one day during the term. Abner Mikva and I both asked Justice [Felix] Frankfurter the same question, which was, “Why is the Brown case being postponed?” Justice Frankfurter said something that shocked us. He looked at us and said, "You think we're going to decide that case during an election year, a presidential election year?" So it was very blunt that the court paid attention to politics, as part of history.

DePue: Especially such an important case like that that was going to affect the entire country.

Minow: Exactly. Of course, a year or two later, Chief Justice [Fred M.] Vinson died. Chief Justice [Earl] Warren became the chief justice. He was determined to get a unanimous decision in the Supreme Court. They worked on it, and [it] came out, I think, in '54.

DePue: Had you ever given consideration to going into a judicial career during your long tenure as a lawyer?

Minow: I thought about it. At one time in my life I thought I would like to be an appellate judge, not a trial judge. I tried some cases but not enough to have experience to be a trial judge. But I thought about it. Senator [Charles] Percy, when he was an Illinois senator, asked me if I would like to become a federal judge. He said he would support it. I thought about it hard, and I decided against pursuing it, because I reflected that I had too many outside interests. I like to be involved in too many things that I would have to say no to, if I were on the bench.

DePue: Outside interests, such as?

Minow: Such as politics, such as universities, such as public broadcasting. I had too many things that I was interested in.

DePue: As a lawyer, what was the main focus of your experience?

Minow: I'm one of the last, I think, of the generalists. There are not many generalists left, but I have, over the years, done a lot of business law, mergers,

acquisitions, corporate law. I've tried cases. I tried one case for a union, the airline pilots' union [the Airline Pilots' Association]. I've done some international work, handled a major building of a new city in Israel. I have had experience with trusts and estates. I've handled actually two divorces, which I'll never do again. And I've counseled families. So I'm one of the last of the lawyers who likes to not specialize.

DePue: I would imagine though, with your experience with the FCC, that you dealt with a lot of telecommunications cases.

Minow: I have, particularly our firm represented AT&T during the antitrust and divestiture period. My partner Howard Trienens did that and became general counsel of AT&T.

DePue: That was in the early '80s.

Minow: Early '80s. I've also represented some broadcasters, some cable interests. I've tried to stay away from the FCC, but I did have one case I argued there, years ago.

But my legal career has been building a great firm, which is now huge, now 1,900 lawyers. We're in Europe. We're in Asia. We're in the United States and attracting very, very able lawyers and working together as teams. I've spent a great deal of time representing the First National Bank of Chicago, which today is part of the Chase Banks.

DePue: There's a common theme here or thread, if you look back at what we've been talking about. FCC, you had to come in and, as a manager, basically fix that institution. Your involvement with Northwestern, at a key moment of their history of selecting a new president, because of management issues. I think the term you used is somebody who could be a "good strong manager." Now your discussion again, as a manager of a law firm. Is that something that you've reflected on, in terms of your success?

Minow: I've thought a lot about that. I have a fairly short attention span. I don't like to do a lot of the detail. I know what I'm good at, and I know what I'm not good at. What I'm good at is evaluating people. I can tell pretty quickly if somebody will be good at a certain task or not.

DePue: I didn't expect this, but that's the perfect segue into what I want to talk about next, and that's your relationship with a young lawyer by the name of Barack Obama. But we're going to go back even a couple steps before that, because I think you were at Sidley Austin at the time, and a young lawyer by the name of Michelle Robinson joined the firm. Tell me about that.

Minow: We had the benefit of Michelle with us for a few years. Michelle is a Chicagoan, very well educated, Princeton, Harvard Law School. She came to us straight out of law school, and she worked in the group actually that I was in. It was sort of a communications group. We represented advertising agencies, marketing people. Michelle was doing fine work with us.

One day one of my daughter's, my middle daughter Martha, who at that time was a professor, later dean, at Harvard Law School, she was a professor, and she called up. She said…I should say, Martha's been at Harvard since 1981. So that is a long time, more than thirty years, and she's called me about one student, thirty-plus years, one student. She said, "Dad, I know your firm doesn't…" We have a summer program for law students, summer interns. She said, "I know your firm doesn't hire first year law students, who've only finished their first year." She said, "But I've got one that is so exceptional, and he wants to spend the summer in Chicago. I think your firm should at least think about it."

I said, "What's his name?" She said, "Barack Obama." I said, "You'll have to spell that for me," and she did. I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call our recruiting bunch, and we'll get him interviewed." Well our recruiting at that time was headed by a lawyer named John Levi. John was a top lawyer, and he was the son of Edward Levi, who had been the president University of Chicago, also attorney general of the United States, under President Ford.

I called John, and I said, "Martha called." He knew Martha. I said, "Martha called about a student that she said we should interview." John said, "What's his name?" I said. "Well he's a first-year student whose name is Barack Obama." John started to laugh. I said, "What are you laughing about? It's not funny." He said, "Newt, we've hired him." He said, "He was here this week. We've interviewed him. We've hired him. We heard he was exceptional, and he was. We hired him on the spot." So I said, "Well that's fine." I called Martha and I said, "I didn't know this. He's already been hired." So Barack came to the firm.

DePue: Just as a summer intern?

Minow: A summer intern. We always assign a lawyer in the firm to be sort of a supervisor/mentor. John assigned Michelle Robinson to be Barack's junior. I didn't pay too much attention, but I did work with him on one matter. I found him to be exceptional, just as Martha had predicted. We became friends, and I would take him to lunch occasionally.

One day, Howard Trienens…Howard and I were both managing partners of the firm. He was chairman of the firm. We took Barack to lunch, and we urged him to think about becoming a law clerk at the Supreme Court. This was before he was editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Law Review*. He said he wasn't interested. I said, "You're making a mistake." I said, "This is an extraordinary experience." He said, "I'm older when I started law school. I'm anxious to get on with my life and my career, and I don't want to do that." So he said no. And then, he finished the summer with us.

One day, my wife Jo and I…I guess this was the next summer. One night, we went to the theater to see Spike Lee's movie, *Do the Right Thing.* We ran into Barack and Michelle. They were out on a date. Michelle was extremely embarrassed. She felt that, as supervisor of Barack, she shouldn't be socializing or dating. I could see she was upset. I said, "Forget it. Have a good time. Enjoy it."

Then Barack left. He came back the next summer. By this time we knew they were dating. We took them to Ravinia. Ravinia is our outdoor Chicago Symphony Orchestra summer venue, where the orchestra and a lot of other entertainment during the summer. We took them there. We saw each other more that summer. At the end of the summer, Barack came in to see me, and he said he was leaving.

We had offered him a job for the future. He said he couldn't take the job. I said, "Why?" He said, "I'm thinking of going into politics." I said, "Well that's good." I said, "We like to see talented people going to politics. We will try to help you." He said, "I don't think you're going to want to help me when I tell you the rest of the story." We were both standing up in my office, and he said, "I'd rather you sit down before…" I thought, "What the hell is this?" So we both sat down. He said, "I'm taking Michelle with me." I said, "You no-good, rotten, worthless piece of …" He said, "Hold it. We're going to get married." I said, "Well, that's different." Then he told me, and then Michelle shortly left.

We kept in touch. Barack then finished law school. Then he became editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Law Review*. He became well-known. There was a big story about him in the—

DePue: So he was only coming back to Sidley Austin as an intern each summer?

Minow: Yes. Then he cut it short, because he had to go back to work on the Law Review. Then he came back to Chicago, and then I started to see that he was interested in politics. He became a candidate for the state legislature.

DePue: Now before you go too much further—we'll come back to this—the first time you met him. You'd already heard about him from your daughter and from your colleagues, that he was an exceptional student. What impressed you about him that first time you met him?

Minow: He was extraordinarily mature for a young person. I could tell from his demeanor, his judgment. I could see he was intelligent, but his maturity was the thing that hit me the most. When he decided to run for office, we had a fundraiser for him. My wife and I had it in our apartment. Barack was a poor candidate. He—

DePue: Poor, as in he didn't have the finances, or he was not skilled?

Minow: Both. He didn't have the finances, and he was not skilled. I remember very clearly, in our living room he was standing before our fireplace, answering questions from potential supporters and donors. He would give long, academic, involved answers, "On the one hand this, on the one hand that." And he was not crisp, not…So we told him, "Barack, You got to get better." Well, he did get better. The more he was exposed, he got better and better. He was elected.

DePue: This is '96?

Minow: This was to the state senate.

DePue: Illinois State Senate in 1996?

Minow: Something like that, somewhere in there. Then we kept in touch. We'd often have lunch together. I belonged to the Commercial Club, where they'd have important speakers. I'd invite Barack to come to lunch, and he would come for the speaker. Then one day, he told us he decided to run for Congress. He's going to run in the Democratic primary against the incumbent Congressman Bobby Rush[23].

DePue: That was 2000.

Minow: I said, "Are you nuts?" I said, "Why are you doing this?" He said, "Well, I think that Rush is vulnerable." He had run for mayor against Richard M. Daley and lost badly. He said, "And I would like to be in national office in Congress." I said, "I think you're making a mistake."

I had a number of black clients, including successful businessmen in Chicago, including John Johnson, the owner and publisher of *Ebony* magazine. I'd called a number of them. I'd represented a group of them in a cable television enterprise. They could all afford it, and I asked them for a contribution for Barack. I raised exactly zero, because they all said the same thing to me. They said, "Let him wait his turn. Let him wait his turn. Let him wait his turn." He ran and lost very badly. It looked like his political career had hit an abyss.

DePue: Before you go farther, what was the nature your relationship with him? There are a couple times that you've just been talking about, when he's come and asked your opinion about some important decisions in his life, not to mention, I would assume, for campaign contributions, as well.

Minow: Yes, and we contributed.

DePue: Are you a mentor of sorts to him?

Minow: Sort of. In fact, he called me a mentor. I have a picture I treasure, in my office, a picture taken with Abner Mikva and me—I'll come to that—where he calls me his wonderful mentor. I was sort of an adviser. Our difference in age…I was old enough to be his father. I think he looked to me as an adviser, helper.

Then one day he called me. He said he wanted to have lunch. He told me he had to make a decision about his future. He had a chance, maybe, to be head of a major foundation here in Chicago, which would be a good job, where he'd have a good salary.

DePue: I believe that was the Joyce Foundation?

[23] Bobby Lee Rush is an American politician, civil rights leader and pastor. Rush is the U.S. Representative for Illinois's 1st congressional district, serving in Congress for more than two decades; he was first elected in 1992 and took office in 1993. He has since won consecutive re-election.

Minow: I think it was the Joyce Foundation. He was already a trustee of that foundation, and Michelle wanted him to do that. He'd have some stability in his life. He wouldn't be traveling back and forth always to Springfield for the state senate. But he said he also wanted to be a senator. I said, "Barack, you are a senator." He said, "I don't mean an Illinois State Senator. I mean an Illinois United States Senator." And there was going to be a vacancy.

DePue: Peter Fitzgerald was up for reelection.

Minow: Correct.

DePue: He was something of a renegade Republican that decided not to run.

Minow: He decided not to run. I said, "Barack," I said, "have you got any money?" He said, "No, not a penny." I said, "What makes you think you could do this?" He said, "I believe I could win." I said, "Barack, the only way black candidates win statewide elections—as proved by what happened with Carol Moseley Braun[24] in Chicago, with Harold Washington—is if there's one black candidate and more than one white candidate. Otherwise, you really don't have a chance." I said, "Will you be the only black candidate?"

DePue: You're talking about the Democratic primary.

Minow: Primary. He said, "Yes." And I said, "How do you know that?" He said, "Well, I've checked. Jesse Jackson is not going to run. They're going to support me. I don't think Carol Moseley Braun is going to run. I believe I'll be the only black candidate." I said, "Will there be more than one white candidate?" He said, "There'll be more than two." And I said, "Are you sure of that?" He said, "Well, I can't swear to it, but I think there'll be a number of…" I said, "Well, at least numerically, you would at least have a chance. Now, what about money?" He said, "I don't have any." So I tried a couple of friends to become his finance chairman. They all said no.

But he went ahead. The announcement day came, and I went to it. It was in one of the Chicago hotels. I think there were two white people there. One was David Axelrod[25], and one was me. The others were all black, including the black politicians, including Emil Jones[26], other black leaders.

[24] Carol Elizabeth Moseley Braun is an American diplomat, politician and lawyer who represented Illinois in the United States Senate from 1993 to 1999. She was the first female African American senator, the first African American U.S. senator for the Democratic Party, the first woman to defeat an incumbent U.S. senator in an election, and the first female senator from Illinois. She was a candidate for the Democratic nomination during the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Following the public announcement by Richard M. Daley that he would not seek re-election, in November 2010, Braun began her campaign for mayor of Chicago. The former senator placed fourth in a field of six candidates, losing the February 22, 2011, election to Rahm Emanuel.

[25] David M. Axelrod is an American political operative and political analyst, best known as the chief strategist for Barack Obama's presidential campaigns. After Obama's election, Axelrod was appointed as senior advisor to the president.

[26] Emil Jones was the president of the Illinois Senate from 2003 to 2009. A Democrat, Jones served in the Illinois Senate from 1983 to 2009. He claims to be one of Barack Obama's mentors while Obama served in the Illinois Senate.

And Barack announced his candidacy. Everybody who knew anything thought it was foolish.

DePue: Would it be fair to say, at that time, he's still a relatively obscure Illinois politician?

Minow: Absolutely. Not many people knew who he was. It was like a stranger to most voters. Then he got lucky. He was way behind in the polls, but the leading opponent got in trouble with his ex-wife. He sunk in the polls, and Barack won the nomination.

DePue: His two main opposition candidates were Dan Hynes, who was the controller at that time—

Minow: Right, and then another—

DePue: Blair Hull.

Minow: Blair Hull. Blair Hull's the one who got in trouble with his ex-wife. So Barack won the primary. Then the question is the general election. There was a very attractive Republican candidate named Ryan, who I had met. He was an investment banker in town. And then **he** got in trouble with his ex-wife.

DePue: I'm sorry to keep interrupting here, but it's fair to mention this is Jack Ryan, no relation to George Ryan, the impeached former governor, nor Jim Ryan, the former attorney general.

Minow: Correct, correct.

DePue: But he had that Ryan name that didn't help.

Minow: He sunk in the polls. Then the Republicans did a very foolish thing. They imported a black candidate who was a terrible candidate. I forgot his name.

DePue: Alan Keyes[27], from Maryland.

Minow: He was dreadful. In fact, I went with Barack to the one debate that they had at WTTW[28]. I sat right behind Barack. He was plenty edgy and nervous, but he handled himself very well. Finally, everybody saw that the Republican candidate was a disaster, including most Republicans. And Barack won by a very substantial margin.

DePue: Slightly over 70 percent of the vote. By the time he had that debate with Alan Keyes, he was no longer obscure. He was nationally renowned, wasn't he?

[27] Alan Lee Keyes is an American conservative political activist, pundit, author, former diplomat, and perennial candidate for public office. Keyes ran for president of the United States in 1996, 2000 and 2008. He was the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate in Maryland against Paul Sarbanes in 1988 and Barbara Mikulski in 1992, as well as in Illinois against Barack Obama in 2004. Keyes lost all three elections by wide margins

[28] WTTW is the primary Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member television station licensed to Chicago, Illinois.

Minow: He was, and he was developing a reputation as being an unusually successful candidate, getting along, even with the other side. His reputation in the Illinois legislature had won the respect and even the admiration of a number of his Republican colleagues.

DePue: Did you attend the Democratic convention that year in Boston?

Minow: No, I didn't. But I watched his speech on television, and I said to myself, The sky is the limit now for Barack.

DePue: What was it about that speech that is so memorable, that a lot of people say launched his political career?

Minow: I think it did. I think that speech, more than anything else, was responsible for making him a nationally possible candidate. Now, one thing I want to tell you is that during this period, as he was attracting attention, several people would come to interview me about him. One was an author named David Garrow, G-a-r-r-o-w, who's just written a new book about Barack Obama.

DePue: *Rising Star: The Making of Barack Obama*.

Minow: Right. In the course of it, Mr. Garrow said to me, "I understand you wrote a letter, recommending him for some fellowship, some national fellowship, in which you predicted that he would become the president of the United States." I said, "I don't have any recollection of that."

He said, "Do you keep your correspondence files? Do you keep copies of your letters?" I said, "Periodically, we give all my files, non-firm files, my personal files, to the Chicago History Museum. My wife is a trustee there, and we're very active with the Chicago History Museum, and they want them. You can go over there and see if you can find it." So he went to the Chicago History Museum, and by God, he finds the letter.

In the letter, which is in his book, I did say, "This is going to be one of the most important leaders of his generation, and one day he will be either the mayor of Chicago or the governor of Illinois or the senator from Illinois." I did not say that he would be president of the United States. That never crossed my mind, that he could become president. But I did see in him the potential to become a very important person.

DePue: I keep going back to this, but what qualities really came out in the forefront, when you worked with him, because by now you've had several years' relationship with him?

Minow: It seemed to me that he was a grown-up more than anything else and that he was fair; he was wise; he had the temperament. Actually, when he started to become a candidate for president, Todd Purdum, who had been a *New York Times* correspondent—today he's a contributing writer for the *Vanity Fair* magazine—he interviewed me. He asked me the same question you're asking. He said, "What was it about him?" And I said, "I remember when Franklin Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, Oliver Wendell Holmes, the

Supreme Court judge, was still alive. Roosevelt went to see Justice Holmes. When he left, the press asked Justice Holmes, 'What did you think?' And Holmes said, 'He's got a first class temperament and a second class intellect.'"

I said, "With Barack Obama, you've got a first class temperament plus a first class intellect. He's got those two qualities, a fine mind and a very balanced, wonderful temperament. That's why I think…" I believe I was right. I think that's what Barack is.

DePue: At that time, did you have a sense of his politics, his philosophical leanings?

Minow: I knew he was liberal, but I also knew that he was a person who was more to the moderate side than the extreme liberal side. I knew he was very aware that we had a country with diverse opinions, backgrounds and that you had to reconcile all this.

DePue: Early this afternoon, when we began, you mentioned Abner Mikva again. From what I understand, both you and Mikva did play a role, where Barack Obama would come and ask for your advice.

Minow: Well, that was a strange thing, because neither Abner nor I were aware that the other was helping Barack. We've discovered that later. When Abner finished in the Clinton White House and came home, we saw a lot of each other, but we were not aware that both of us knew Barack. Then later we discovered this.

When Barack was deciding, at the end of 2006, whether he should run for president, I had written an op-ed for the *Chicago Tribune,* urging him to run for president. So he [Barack] knew what I thought. But he called me, and he said, "I'd like to have a talk with you and Abner. I'm going to be in Chicago on such and such a day. Can you get Abner to come to your office? I'll come to your office. I'd like to have a talk."

So we met with him in my office. I have a wonderful picture that my assistant, Kathy Schultz, took with her iPhone. What Barack said basically was this. He was taking his family to Hawaii to make a final decision whether he would run for president. What was bothering him the most was, if he did this, whether he could be a good father. He said, "I know I'll never be home. I got two young daughters. I'll be gone. I know that each of you has three daughters. They've turned out very well. Do you think I can be a good father?"

I said, "Barack," I said, "I'm not a psychiatrist, but I believe a parent's greatest influence on a child is when they're teenagers, not when they're very small." I said, "Your kids are still very small. If you get elected, which I doubt," I said—because I thought he could be running for vice president is what I thought—"If you get elected, you'll be with your kids all the time, because you'll be living above the store. Your kids will be teenagers, and you will have a greater influence on them." He's writing all this down. I said, "Why are you writing this down?" He said, "I want to tell this to Michelle." I said, "Don't listen to this." I said, "I'm not an expert." He said, "I'm just writing it down."

Years later, the last year of his presidency—this is now nine years later—I'm reading an interview with Barack in the *New York Times* on a Sunday. In it the question was, "Why did you decide to run when you did?" He said, "I decided to run when my children were small, because I think the biggest influence on a child is when the children are teenagers. And now I live above the store, and I can see my kids all the time." I said to myself, "By God, it stuck." This is nine or ten years later, and this stuck with him, even the same words.

DePue: Well, he should have thrown in a credit, that it came from you and Mikva. (Minow laughs)

Minow: Well, between Abner and myself, we have six daughters. Five are lawyers and one is a rabbi.

DePue: It does sound like, from that story, that the person he had to convince the most…I mean, if you're going to run for president, you can't do this as a half-mission. You have to be all in and really, really driven.

Minow: And Michelle was not there at that time. She was also, justifiably, very concerned about his safety.

DePue: Was that a concern of yours as well?

Minow: Yes. In fact, I remember Abner at that time specifically said, "Barack, if you're going to run, you've got to get your own security around."

DePue: Didn't even trust the Secret Service?

Minow: Well, he started off with his own, and then Senator [Richard] Durbin—I think there had been some threats—Senator Durbin got him some Secret Service protection very early.

DePue: I can't remember at what stage of the campaign—

Minow: I think it was very early.

DePue: …that the Secret Service is assigned. That would make sense, yeah. Well, how about the financial part of it? By this time, were you still involved in the campaign, the presidential campaign in late 2006 and 2007?

Minow: Yes, except, because of my role with the Presidential Debates Commission, I could not, either financially or any other way, be deeply involved in the campaign. So I wasn't.

DePue: Did you offer any advice about how to run an effective campaign?

Minow: Not really. No one asked me. In fact, I would have done things a little differently. (laughs) But they knew what they were doing. I would have done things differently when he went in the White House.

DePue: Okay, not so much during the campaign, but in the White House?

Minow: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: The heir apparent for the Democrats—I think this is fair to say—in late 2006 would have been Hillary Clinton. Is that your assumption, that he would have been vice president, and Clinton would have been the president?

Minow: He could have been, but Hillary had made a ghastly error. She didn't admit that she was wrong about the Iraq War, whereas Barack had been against the Iraq War from the beginning. I believe that that was the decisive thing that changed, particularly in the first Iowa caucuses.

DePue: That was certainly a memorable campaign on both sides, Republicans and Democrats. Before we get there though, I wonder how closely you were following his career when he was an Illinois state senator.

Minow: Not really. I did have one idea. I went to him with it, and it didn't work. I said, "This donor of your organs program is very important. What we do now is ask people, when they get a drivers' license, if they want to be a donor. We should ask them repeatedly." Now they ask people when they go in the hospital. That's not the time to ask people that. What I suggested is, when you register to vote, you should be asked if you want to be an organ donor. I wanted them to change the law. Barack thought about it. I don't think it ever happened.

DePue: Did you have a personal reason for feeling so strongly about that?

Minow: No, but I feel very strongly that donating organs is a great life saver. I'm also a great believer in letting people choose how they want to die.

DePue: Well, let's get back to that presidential campaign year of 2004. You just mentioned the Iowa caucus. That's obviously the first place. It's always an intense lead up to that, and it's anybody's guess how it's going to turn out. I would assume you were following the campaign for that entire year.

Minow: I am. But again, because of the Debate Commission, I didn't contribute, and I didn't go to meetings or campaign in any way. I think the important thing in Iowa was the Iraq War position, particularly for young people, college students, who were against the war and who came out in the caucuses, who had never been involved before.

DePue: Were you surprised by how well candidate Obama seemed to be connecting with the audience?

Minow: No. Actually what persuaded me that he should run was one Sunday afternoon, my wife and I were home, and I had C-SPAN on television. Barack was speaking in Iowa at the, whatever it was, a fish fry or something that the senator—I'm trying to remember his name; he's no longer in office—the senator had every year. Barack was speaking.

DePue: Harkin?

Minow: Harkin [Iowa Senator Thomas Richard Harkin]. I watched this on television, and I said to Jo, I said, "This is Jack Kennedy all over again." I said, "Look at

that audience. Look at how they're responding to him. This is Jack Kennedy all over again." That's what I thought. That's when I wrote the piece for the *Tribune*, urging him to run.

DePue: So he was already on the campaign trail when you wrote the article for the *Tribune.*

Minow: He was thinking about it. He didn't announce his run until the beginning of the next year. I think the Harkin thing was in the summer.

DePue: This would have been the summer of 2000 and—

Minow: Six. He made the decision to run, I think, in January of '07 and the election campaign was in '08.

DePue: I mentioned Hillary Clinton, born and raised in Chicago. Did you know her?

Minow: Yes. I knew Hillary because we used to go to Renaissance weekend every Christmas, and Hillary and Bill were there. We met them before he became president, and I like her.

DePue: That was my next question. What did you think of her as a potential president?

Minow: I think she would have been a very good president. I think she was not a good candidate, particularly in 2016, but I think she would have been an excellent president.

DePue: It's a bumpy primary race on the Democrat side, the Republican side as well, but I think most of the attention that year was on the Democrat side. Towards the middle or late part of that primary race, a couple of issues came to the forefront. One of them was the church that Barack Obama attended, here in Chicago. I wanted to ask you how much you knew about his relationship with Jeremiah Wright[29] and that church.

Minow: I knew nothing, period, nothing. But when it came public, I thought Barack had to get away from that guy as quickly as possible.

DePue: Do you think he handled it well?

Minow: I think he did in the end. I would have done it a lot faster.

DePue: As I recall, the first time he came out, it was in general support of Pastor Wright. Then he had to back away from that.

Minow: Then Pastor Wright did an extraordinarily dumb thing at the National Press Club, where he was going on and on. Barack had no choice at that point. I would have divorced Reverend Wright a lot faster.

[29] Reverend Jeremiah Wright, retired senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ and former pastor of Barack Obama, gained national attention in the United States in March 2008, when ABC News, after reviewing dozens of sermons delivered by presidential candidate's pastor, excerpted parts that were subject to intense media scrutiny.

DePue: The other issue, and this is more in the general campaign, but another one of the issues that the conservative side of the Republican Party was especially harping on was an association with Bill Ayers[30]. Do you know anything about that?

Minow: With who?

DePue: With Ayers. Did I get the first name wrong?

Minow: Oh, yeah. I think that that was very inaccurate. I don't think they were friends at all. I think they lived in the same neighborhood. I don't think there was any relationship of any consequence there.

DePue: The Republican candidate is John McCain. He touted himself to be a maverick and really built on that whole concept of a maverick. Any comments about—

Minow: I have great respect. I know Senator McCain. I have great respect and admiration for him, not only as a war hero. I like what he's saying about President Trump, and I like Senator McCain. I think he made one unforgivable error.

DePue: I think I might know what it is, but I'll let you mention it.

Minow: It was picking Palin as his running mate.

DePue: Alaska Governor Sarah Palin.

Minow: It was a very, very bad decision.

DePue: Do you think he ran a credible campaign against candidate Obama?

Minow: Yes, except I think Palin hurt him a lot.

DePue: We started this morning talking quite a bit about politics in the 1950s, when you were supporting Adlai Stevenson, about your role in the FCC and the nature of television at that time.

Now we're talking about 2008. The world has changed, as far as how presidential campaigns are covered. You've got the Internet. You've got cable television. You've got talk radio. I wonder if you can reflect a little bit about how politics has changed because of all of that.

Minow: Politics has suffered greatly by the proliferation of competitive news media, which are all shouting extremist views. The worst thing that's happened is, we used to have a common set of facts, where people got started from the same facts and drew their own conclusions. Now we're arguing about facts all the time. Pat Moynihan said it all in one sentence. He said, "This is a free country.

[30] William Charles "Bill" Ayers is an American elementary education theorist and a leader in the counterculture movement who was known for his 1960s radical activism and his current work in education reform, curriculum and instruction. In 1969, he co-founded the Weather Underground, a terrorist group which was self-described as a "community revolutionary group, with the intent to overthrow imperialism.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Ayers

Everybody's entitled to their own opinions but not to their own facts." What's happened is everybody's got their own facts now. They don't believe the same things.

DePue: The conservative critique of that comment would be, who gets to decide what the facts are?

Minow: I understand that. I think the answer is that common sense, rather than ideology, decides what the facts are. Currently, ideology decides what the facts are.

DePue: Having broached that subject, there are a couple of the other issues that raise their heads. Obviously, race is always going to be an issue, when you have something like this. A couple of other issues are questions about candidate Obama's nationality, whether he was born in the United States, and also questions about his religion. Do you care to reflect on either of those?

Minow: Well, I wondered why President Obama was hesitant to release his birth certificate. I would have done it much faster.

DePue: That was well after the election.

Minow: Yeah. I would have done that much faster. As far as his religion is concerned, it seems to me he is a Christian, without question. Why that should even be attacked, I don't understand.

Where I differ somewhat is on a different issue. I think American elections…Take the last eight or nine elections. They're decided by a hair. It's usually two points, three points, one point, less than one point. If you could take ten people, who exactly reflected the electorate, and bring them into the White House for a meeting and wanted it to be exactly conforming to the election results, you'd have to take one person and cut them into pieces. It's not six and four; it's five and three-quarters.

Our elections are very close. Result mean we have a divided country. What I would do…If I were elected president, the first thing I would do is get my campaign staff to go over to the Democratic National Committee, and I would bring a bipartisan group of advisers into the White House, because that's what you're dealing with today.

DePue: Would they be able to find a bipartisan group of advisers anymore?

Minow: Well, in American history, look what Lincoln did, with the Doris Kearns book, great book, *The Team of Rivals*. I think we tend to bring partisanship. We've certainly got it in Illinois today, as a classic example of failure of bringing bipartisanship together. Today, if you believe the public opinion polls, more people say, "I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican. I'm an independent." They outnumber those people who say, "I'm a Democrat, or I'm a Republican." The country is sick and tired of this bitter, bitter partisanship, and no politician seems to be able to surmount it.

DePue: That takes us back to the 2008 election where, during the general election, Barack Obama seemed to find that magic of really appealing to lots of different people, across lines.

Minow: Exactly. But after that, it didn't work out that way. I'm very positive about it. I am a good friend of Don Rumsfeld.[31] We're friends for many, many years. When Nixon was leaving the White House, and it looked like Jerry Ford was going to become president, I knew that Don was close to Ford. So I called Don. I said, "I've got a big idea. Can I have two minutes on the phone?" He said, "You got a big idea, you can have two hours. What's the idea?"

I said, "Jerry [Gerald] Ford is going to become the president. He should go on television. He should say, 'I'm the first president of the United States who was never elected president or vice president. We've got an unprecedented situation here. I've asked the senior Democrat in the senate, Senator [Mike] Mansfield[32], to be my vice president. Senator Mansfield and I promise we will not run for office at the next election. Instead we're going to run a bipartisan government, and we're going to unite this country.'"

I don't hear anything on the phone. I thought we were disconnected. I said, "Hello? Hello?" Don says, "I heard you." I said, "What do you think?" He says, "Do you know Jerry Ford?" I said, "I've met him. I don't…" He said, "He's never going to do that." I said, "Tell him. I think this is what the country needs. I believe that. Whatever opportunities we have to get rid of this current bitter, bitter partisanship, we've got to do it." Franklin Roosevelt managed to do it, when he did it with Senator Vandenberg during World War II.

DePue: He changed his vice presidential candidate in 1944 and brought in Harry Truman.

Minow: Yes.

DePue: Well, going back to Jerry Ford, what he thought was necessary to get beyond the Watergate years was to pardon Richard Nixon. What did you think about that?

Minow: I think he did the right thing, but he didn't explain it properly. Years later, my wife and I were invited to the Ford library [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library]. This was after he lost. I said, "President Ford"—He knew me from the Debate Commission and at that time, the League of Women Voters—I said, "Mr. President, thank you very much for participating in the debates. You're the first incumbent president to participate in the debates."

[31] Donald Henry "Don" Rumsfeld is a retired American political figure and businessman. Rumsfeld served as secretary of defense from 1975 to 1977, under President Gerald Ford and again from 2001 to 2006 under President George W. Bush.

[32] Michael Joseph Mansfield was an American politician and diplomat. A member of the Democratic Party, he served as a U.S. representative (1943–1953) and a U.S. senator (1953–1977) from Montana. He was the longest-serving Senate majority leader, serving from 1961–1977. During his tenure, he shepherded Great Society programs through the Senate and strongly opposed the Vietnam War.

He said, "I think the debates helped me." He said "When I entered the debates, I was thirty-three points behind. Everybody thinks, because I made that remark about Poland,[33] that I lost the election in the debates." He said, "The debates helped me. When the election time came, I lost it by a hair." He said, "I think that the debates helped me." I'm a great admirer of President Ford.

DePue: I didn't expect to be talking about Jerry Ford in this, but that's one of the delightful parts of doing these interviews. Let's go back to Barack Obama's 2008 campaign. We've been talking about that already quite a bit, but how well do you think he did during the general campaign, of running that campaign?

Minow: Excellent. I think it was brilliant, and I give a lot of credit to my friend David Axelrod[34] for figuring it out.

DePue: Another Chicagoan.

Minow: Yes.

DePue: What was your mood then on election night?

Minow: I thought it would be close. We did not go to the ceremony, here at Grant Park. We watched it on television, with tears in our eyes.

DePue: I can imagine. You're in your 80s by that time?

Minow: Yes, right.

DePue: Did you go to the inauguration?

Minow: Yes we did. We were invited. We were treated like family and friends at the inauguration, saw the president several times, and I cried a lot. I thought, "My God, what a thing," particularly having known him and seeing for the first time in American history a black candidate becoming the president.

DePue: Were a lot of your emotions tied to that significant first, that he was an African-American becoming U.S. president?

Minow: Yes.

DePue: Did that work out as well as you had hoped?

Minow: Yes and no. I thought, when he was elected, that every black child in America would say, "Wow, there's no limit to what I can accomplish." It has not worked out that way. I think, unfortunately, racism is still with us, and it's still

[33] In 1976, President Gerald Ford, who'd challenged Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter to a televised debate, inexplicably said that Eastern Europe was not dominated by the Soviet Union, which in fact had three Army divisions in Poland alone at that time.

[34] David M. Axelrod is an American political operative and political analyst, best known as the chief strategist for Barack Obama's presidential campaigns.

a major problem in the United States. This is 150 plus years after the Civil War.

DePue: I've got a few more questions about his administration. Before I do that, I wanted to ask you about… You've gotten lots of awards and recognition during your life, but one of the more important ones to you is the Presidential Medal of Freedom[35] that you got, just this last year?

Minow: It's **the** most important award particularly because it was given to me by President Obama.

DePue: Who else was in the group with you?[36]

Minow: Well, it was amazing. It was Tom Hanks and Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jordan and Bill Gates and Melinda Gates. It was just extraordinary. One funny experience. We were seated alphabetically, and I was seated next to Lorne Michaels, the producer of *Saturday Night Live*.[37] I said, "Mr. Michaels it's a pleasure to meet you, but I've got some bad news for you." He said, "What's that?" I said, "I'm on the Presidential Debate Commission. From now on, *Saturday Night Live* is going to pay us royalties, because we give you your best material." He said, "We couldn't afford it!" (laughs)

DePue: I've got to ask you this then. Does *Saturday Night Live* represent the best of what television can become?

Minow: Sometimes it's just terrific. Sometimes it's terrible.

DePue: Sometimes it would belong in the vast wasteland?

Minow: Yes. As I say, my favorite line of the movie, *Some Like It Hot,*[38] when Joe E. Brown proposes marriage to Jack Lemmon. And she says, "I can't marry you." She said, "I'm not a woman." He said, "Well, nobody's perfect."(both laugh)

DePue: A classic movie. The Obama administration, eight years. Obviously, for the entire time period that he's in office, we're fighting the war on terror. I want to have you give your assessment of his administration. Let's start domestically.

Minow: Well, he did a historic thing by enabling everybody in America to have healthcare. That legislation is a long way from being perfect, but the principle, the basic point, being nobody should be deprived of healthcare in this country,

[35] The Presidential Medal of Freedom is an award bestowed by the President of the United States and is—along with the comparable Congressional Gold Medal—the highest civilian award of the United States.
[36]Barack Obama bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, to some of the country's best known performers, scientists and athletes, including Tom Hanks, Diana Ross, Bruce Springsteen, Michael Jordan and Bill and Melinda Gates, President Obama awarded 123 medals, the most of any U.S. president.
[37] An American late-night live television variety show, with comedy sketches that parody contemporary culture and politics.
[38] A 1959 American romantic comedy film, set in 1929, directed and produced by Billy Wilder, starring Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon.

is correct. That's what I think he'll be remembered for, domestically, the most. There are many other good things, but I think that'll head the list.

DePue: Now the international stage.

Minow: On the national stage, we didn't get in anymore wars. I think I would have, if it were my choice. I would have gotten everybody, all Americans, out of Iraq and out of Afghanistan. I wouldn't have kept anybody there. Those were two mistakes that started before him.

DePue: But you get to inherit your predecessor's mistakes.

Minow: You do.

DePue: Many, obviously the conservatives, would say that because we pulled out as quickly as we did in Iraq, that that allowed for the emergence of ISIS [Islamic State in Syria and Iraq].

Minow: I know that, and I think our efforts against ISIS have got to be re-doubled and quadrupled. We've got to deal with it. North Korea, as I understand it, President Obama told incoming President Trump that was the most serious thing facing the country. I think that's true. But overall, I give President Obama's administration very high marks, except that I would have pushed more for bipartisanship.

DePue: You mean, reaching out to the Congress more than he did?

Minow: Yes, yes.

DePue: Are you still in touch with the Obamas?

Minow: Well, just recently he came to Chicago to a dinner we were invited to. I couldn't go, so I sent him an email. Then he saw my daughter at the Harvard. He said, "Your dad sent me an email. Tell him I understand perfectly." So I haven't talked to him lately. I would like to very much. I'd like to have a chance in a leisurely, non-rushed way to do that.

DePue: Are you excited about having a presidential library here in Chicago?

Minow: Very much so, and I think it'll be an enormous contribution to life in our city too.

DePue: Are you going to be involved in that in any way?

Minow: Nobody's asked me, so far. I'm sure we'll be contributing to it. I have a friend, Bob Wedgeworth, who was head of the American Library Association, first African-American to hold that job and a great librarian. He used to be the librarian at the University of Illinois. I've gotten him involved. I was the lawyer for the American Library Association for years.

I think that the library will…With all the new media, with the new social media, it'll be more than just a building. It'll be a big, international communications hub.

DePue: We were talking earlier. I understand that you have a connection with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum as well.

Minow: My wife does. My wife was an early trustee of the Abraham Lincoln [Presidential] Library Foundation. She's an honorary life member now.

DePue: Your impressions of that institution?

Minow: Very important. It's shocking to me that it took all these years for President Lincoln to have a library. I tell everybody who have children to take their children to Springfield to see that. It's inspiring.

DePue: We're talking about the presidential library for President Obama coming here to Chicago. You've had a lifelong connection here with Chicago. What keeps bringing you back to the city?

Minow: Well, I love the city. People who've studied it say that Chicago's the most American of all the cities in the United States. I think there's a lot of truth in that, because we've got every nationality, every race, every diverse part of America right here in this city, the great spirit of Chicago. I have lived here since World War II, when I got out of the army. We've got great institutions here.

I'm absolutely against the way we treat guns in this country. We have so much killing and shooting here, and the ones who suffer the most are the African-American community, as a result. We've got to deal with that.

The other part is, I think, everything depends on our schools. Some years ago *Chicago* Magazine[39] interviewed Chicagoans about what was most important in Chicago. I said, "The schools." As a result, the principal of a school in a terrible neighborhood in Chicago, a bilingual Latino, Hispanic school, came to see me and said, "All right, big shot, you want to do something; you'll adopt our school." Well, I got our firm to do that. That was thirty years ago.

For my ninetieth birthday, the Kanoon School had a party for me and asked me to come there. I said to the principal, "Did anybody who went to school here, as a student when we adopted the school, ever come back as a teacher?" She said, "Just a minute," and she brought a young woman over to me. She said, "Mr. Minow, I was in first grade when you first came here."

DePue: Wow. That had to make you feel like there is a special connection there.

Minow: Yes.

[39] *Chicago* is a monthly magazine published by Tronc publishing company. It concentrates on lifestyle and human interest stories, and on reviewing restaurants, travel, fashion, and theatre from or nearby Chicago.

DePue: It's a city of contrasts, isn't it? You mentioned that before, but the downtown area is so vibrant and alive when you come here. It's such a great place for tourists to visit.

Minow: They say it's like a tail of two cities. I was very involved helping John Bryan[40] build Millennium Park. It turned out to be far more successful than we thought at the time. This is a great city, and I love being here.

DePue: You've got the Navy Pier[41] right out our window. Well, here's a crucial question for anybody from Chicago, Cubs or White Sox?

Minow: Cubs. Absolutely the Cubs. We are huge Cubs fan. My dad used to bring my brother and me to see the Cubs when we were little children. We used to drive up from Milwaukee. I knew one day they would win the World Series,[42] and we lived to see it.

DePue: It took practically a miraculous game to do it though, didn't it?

Minow: It was very exciting. I think they had that little break in the rain for a few minutes.

DePue: The rain delay, yes.

Minow: I think that saved them.

DePue: Is the city a good place for a young lawyer to start a career?

Minow: I think it is. I think it's a great place, and I think that we have a very good, not perfect, but a very good judicial system, particularly in the federal courts. We've got a lot of people now as state judges. I've a number of friends who would become judges and are important. We got a very active bar association.

My senior partner, at that time Ed Austin, was very involved when there was a scandal at the Illinois Supreme Court, and two justices had to resign because of the pressure from the bar. I think we can be very proud.

DePue: I'm curious about your connection with Singapore.

Minow: That was, in many ways, an accident, but it's something I'm very proud of. Our firm opened an office in Singapore about thirty years ago. I went there. I was involved in managing the firm. I met the equivalent of the secretary of the treasury. He was very close to Lee Kuan Yew, the prime minister. We struck

[40] John H. Bryan, former Sara Lee Corp. president and CEO, is recognized for more than a decade of efforts on behalf of Chicago's arts scene, most notably the raising of more than $200 million in private funds for the $475 million Millennium Park.

[41] Chicago's 3,300 ft. long Navy Pier encompasses more than fifty acres of parks, gardens, shops, restaurants, family attractions and exhibition facilities and is the top leisure destination in the Midwestern U.S., drawing nearly nine million visitors annually. One of the most visited attractions in the entire Midwest, it is Chicago's number one tourist attraction.

[42] After 108 years of waiting, the Chicago Cubs baseball team won the 2016 World Series, with a wild 8-7, 10-inning game 7 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Nov. 16, 2016 at Cleveland's Progressive Field. The triumph completed their climb back from a 3-1 series deficit to claim their first championship since 1908.

up a friendship, and he said, "We have a little problem here. We wonder if you could help us." What it was, they wanted somebody to put some money into Singapore Airlines—the best airline, probably, in the world—but who wouldn't change anything [from] the way they were doing [it]. We helped them with that. As a result, we established a professional relationship.

Then years later, there was a very critical article about Singapore in the *New York Times Magazine*, saying that it was not as democratic or as free as it should be. I, with my partner then, Mark Angelson, wrote a response saying, "What was the United States like when it started? Was slavery okay? Were women treated okay?" I mean democracy evolves. Singapore did not become an independent nation until after World War II, and it's done remarkably, remarkably well. As a result, they asked me if I'd become the Consul General here in Chicago, which I did.

DePue: Is that an honorary position for you?

Minow: It's an honorary position. I'm just giving it up this week, after sixteen years.

DePue: Bitter-sweet I would think.

Minow: Well, Singapore honored me. It gave me the equivalent of the Medal of Freedom, (laughs) the Singapore medal, which I'm very proud of.

DePue: Outstanding. It's amazing how these things happen in people's lives. One of the things I wanted to turn to next is turning points in your life. I'd imagine that many veterans look at their experiences in war as turning points. Did you see that as the case?

Minow: Definitely. I think the war changed me. I was lucky not to be where a number of my fellow battalion members were. They were in the jungle, with disease and terror. I was at headquarters, which was a safe place. My wife loves the story of what happened to me there. I was running a switchboard, which was important, because you connected India, Burma and China. One day I made a mistake; I disconnected somebody. The voice came on and said, "You disconnected me." I said, "I'm very sorry, sir." He says, "Do you know who this is?" I said, "No." I said, "I don't, sir." He says, "This is Commander Louie Mountbatten, commander in chief of…" We were under British command then. I said, "Oh my God. What have I done?" I said, "Do you know who this is?" And the voice said, "No." I said "Good," and I disconnected everybody, (laughs) and we started all over again.

That was an eye opener for me. Not only to be in that part of the world and to get an exposure to that, but I learned a lot about the different people in the army. I was exposed to people, different views, different backgrounds. I strongly believe there should be national, obligatory public service at some point in this country.

DePue: Another turning point that I imagine you would readily agree with is when you became chairman of the FCC. How did that experience change the trajectory of your life?

Minow: I was a kid; I was thirty-four years old. But I realized how important television was and how the country was not benefiting, to me, as it should from this extraordinary gift. I wanted them to do more news, more public service time and not charge politicians for selling time. I accomplished some of it, not all of it. But I realized what a gift I was given by President Kennedy to have that responsibility.

What I'm particularly proud of, as I think back about it, are two things. One, I was right in saying that we can beat the Russians with this communication satellite tech. And we did. Second, that we now have PBS, public radio, all throughout this country, *Sesame Street*,[43] things like that. I'm very proud of that.

DePue: You mentioned Bill and Melinda Gates. This might be a bit of a stretch, but think how the telecommunication connection has changed the world, just in the last twenty years, because of those satellites, because of the way we now can communicate with each other.

Minow: Nobody foresaw what an implication this would have. As I said, I testified thirteen times in the Congress about it. One day, I remember this, Senator Long from Louisiana said to me, he said, "Chairman Minow, you say this is the one area where we could beat the Russians. What do you suggest we do so we can beat the Russians?" I said, "We could get the Russians to adopt the Administrative Procedures Act.[44] That would tie up their bureaucracy." (both laugh)

Minow: It turned out they had a worse bureaucracy than we do; we didn't know it. But I was so frustrated at that time at how complicated our political system was. We had to deal thirteen times in the Senate, fight with the Department of Justice, fight with everyone. To get something done in this country is hard.

DePue: You've mentioned your three daughters a couple of times. I'll give you an opportunity to brag about them here a little bit.

Minow: Well, we have three extraordinary daughters and three extraordinary grandchildren. My oldest daughter, Nell, who is a University of Chicago trained lawyer, is a shareholder activist. In fact, she's known throughout the country as one of the leading activists in corporate governance. She's also a writer and a film critic, a very respected film critic.

Martha, my middle daughter, is a scholar. She is currently, for another couple of weeks, the dean at Harvard Law School. She's the first dean in

[43] An American educational children's television series that premiered on November 10, 1969, to positive reviews, some controversy, and high viewership. The series combines live action, sketch comedy, animation and puppetry. Since its debut, the program has aired on the U.S.'s national public television provider, PSB.
[44] The Administrative Procedure Act (APA), enacted on June 11, 1946, governs the process by which federal agencies develop and issue regulations. It includes requirements for publishing notices of proposed and final rulemaking in the Federal Register, and provides opportunities for the public to comment on notices of proposed rulemaking.

Harvard Law School in 200 years not to go to Harvard Law School. She went to Yale Law School. She keeps that a secret.

My third daughter, Mary, also a lawyer, Stanford Law School, she is working on a very exciting thing right now. She's a librarian, as well as a lawyer. She thinks libraries can be a very effective answer to fake news. She is working with the American Library Association, with the [Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society] at Harvard and with Facebook on an idea called "Check It Out," where you're watching something on social media. You're not sure if it's right or wrong, where you will have four or five choices to check it out, including a public library. So those are the three girls.

My oldest grandson is a teacher at a public school in Brooklyn. My second oldest granddaughter is a costume designer in Hollywood. She worked on *Mad Men*[45] and a bunch of other television programs. My third granddaughter is a writer. She's already written two or three books and is working on others. She is a fantasy writer, fiction in a fantasy world. They're all three very good, wonderful people.

DePue: Does it make you step back, when you realize your daughter is retiring now?

Minow: My son-in-law (laughs) has retired, and I still go to the office. Well, I was lucky. I met my wife at a very opportune time in life. She's been sensational. She's a very active trustee of the Chicago History Museum and of the Abraham Lincoln [Presidential] Library and of the… She's a great music lover and with the Symphony and with Ravinia[46] and the Council on Global Affairs.[47] So we've had a very active life.

I've had wonderful law partners. My one partner, Howard Trienens and I have been together since law school. That's a long time.

DePue: Sixty plus years?

Minow: Close to seventy.

DePue: Amazing. We've talked a lot about your accomplishments, the things that you're proud of, that you've accomplished while you were chairman in the FCC. What other things in your life are you especially proud of?

Minow: Most of all my family. I was blessed to be born in America, to have a chance to be a citizen of the greatest country. I've known nine presidents.

DePue: Personally.

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[45] Mad Men was a television drama about one of New York's most prestigious ad agencies at the beginning of the 1960s, focusing on one of the firm's most mysterious but extremely talented ad executives.

[46] The Ravinia Festival is the oldest outdoor music festival in the United States, with a series of outdoor concerts and performances held every summer from June to September. Located in Highland Park, IL, the festival operates on the grounds of the 36 acre Ravinia Park, with a variety of outdoor and indoor performing arts facilities.

[47] The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is a global affairs think tank, describing itself as "an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight and influences the public discourse on critical global issues."

Minow: Personally. I've served Republicans and Democrats. President Bush, the first President Bush. When the first Iraq war ended, there was a big debate in the country; should women serve in military combat? There was a big argument in Congress about it. The president appointed a bipartisan commission to study that question. He appointed me; I was a Democratic member of that.

In the second Bush administration, not the president, but Don Rumsfeld, was secretary of defense. He called me, and I headed a major commission for the Department of Defense on the issue of privacy, how to protect privacy when we were doing all these Internet intercepts. I served on that.

DePue: Well, that's ripped right out of today's headlines.

Minow: Yes, it is. We had a very important effect that affected Congress. I have to tell you one story about President Reagan. When I was chairman of PBS, President Reagan invited some public broadcasters in. I'll never forget this. There was just a few of us. My wife was with me. He said, "I'm very interested in what you're doing, but I leave tomorrow at 6:00 in the morning to meet with Gorbachev.[48] I have been given six huge loose-leaf books by my staff. I have to master them before we go. So, I've only got about fifteen minutes. But as long as you're here, there's a story I want to tell Gorbachev, but my staff says I shouldn't. So I'm going to tell it to you, and I want you to tell me if you think I should tell it to Gorbachev."

We said, "Fine." So he says, "There's a citizen in Moscow who desperately wants to own a car. He's worked all his life, forty-five years, saved all his money, and he's told that if he goes to a secret, secret, secret office in the sub, sub, sub-basement of the Kremlin, with the money, he'll be able to get a car. So he takes all his money, and he goes to this office. The commissar says, 'Comrade, what do you want?' He said, 'I want to buy a car.' He says, 'Have you got the money?' He says, 'Yes.' He says, 'Put the money on the…We'll count the money.' They count the money. He says, 'Comrade, congratulations. You're going to be able to have a car.' He says, 'Wonderful. What do I do?' He says, 'Well, you come back to this office ten years from today.' The comrade says, 'Ten years from today.' He says, 'Should I come in the morning, or should I come in the afternoon?' The commissar says, 'Such a silly question. It's ten years from now, and you're asking if you should come in the morning or the afternoon.' The comrade says, 'It's not a silly question.' The comrade said, 'The plumber is coming in the morning.'" (both laugh)

So we said, "Tell the story," and he did. We learned later that he told the story to Gorbachev. Gorbachev didn't like it. But that was Reagan. Reagan restored confidence in the country. And Reagan loved public broadcasting.

[48] Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, a Russian and former Soviet politician, was the eighth and last leader of the Soviet Union.

DePue: Yeah. The great communicator. He had that reputation. So we begin and we close with that subject. Looking back on a long career, what do you think you would like to have as your legacy?

Minow: I think I'd like it to be that he loved his family, loved his country and he tried to contribute to it.

DePue: Mr. Minow, you're definitely going to have an important place in American textbooks, in history books, and in a very positive light. I'll give you an opportunity to finish off with any other reflections you have today, but we're about done.

Minow: Well, I think I repeated about how lucky I've been, very often, to be in the right place at the right moment and to take advantage of that. I worry a lot about the country's future, but I think that the…As I've gotten older, I realize how wise the founders of this country were in the way they distributed power, with the checks and balances system and how resilient, as a nation, we can be.

DePue: And still be an inspiration for much of the rest of the world.

Minow: I think that's our role, and I think we will be.

DePue: Any final comments then, Mr. Minow?

Minow: No, I'm very grateful for this opportunity, Mark. You've asked very searching questions. You got me to reflect, and I hope this will be helpful to somebody someday.

DePue: It will be one of the things that we are most proud to add at our collection. We've got three institutions[49] involved [with this interview], but it's been my great honor to have a chance to get to know you a little bit better and to hear these stories firsthand, because not only are they fascinating, but it's part of America's fabric of history. Thank you very much.

Minow: Thank you.

DePue: And thank you for joining us.

(end of transcript #2)

[49] The Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.