

## Melvin Laird Interview

Interview with Melvin Laird

Date: August 7, 2014

Location: Forest Country Club Board Room, Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: John Harrington, Madisonfilm

Interviewer: I appreciate you taking the time to do this interview. Can you tell us again the story of how you and John Fogarty first met?

Melvin Laird: Well, I'm not sure the first meeting was the important one. But, the first time I was introduced to John Fogarty was when the chairman of his subcommittee and the ranking Republican on that committee, Frank Keefe of Wisconsin... I had been out there visiting as the young state's senator as a guest of Congressmen Burns, Davis, and Ford. I was there and I met John that day in the committee room. I did not really get to know him again until I came to Congress in 1953. I was assigned temporarily to the HEW-Labor subcommittee. John Taber was the ranking Republican and he was the most senior Republican in the House and was on that committee as a ranking Republican and John was the chairman. We kind of hit it off from that time on.

John was so forthright with me and honest in telling me about how he wanted to run the committee and what we could do and the opportunities we had to do things for people. He convinced me that it was the most important committee in the Congress and that he felt that way. After I had served for a year or two I came to the same conclusion. John was always forthright, honest, and his integrity could not be questioned at any time. We played together the game of politics. We loved one another and we believed that we could get along in a bipartisan way.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about what he sounded like, what he looked like, how he dressed. Paint a picture for me.

Melvin Laird: Well, he wasn't a big dresser or anything but he always looked nice and presentable. He was always there in a friendly sort of way. He could be very gruff. He could be tough as the dickens. I should say on a witness. But, he wanted to do it for a purpose—to get to the bottom of a subject. There was no better interrogator than John Fogarty.

Interviewer: You just told me that he convinced you this was the most important subcommittee to be on, but I know you had a lot of home state support.

Melvin Laird: Well, the reason I was interested in being on the committee and asked the Chairman of the House, the Republican side of the committee—John Taber worked on that committee—was because of the Marshfield Clinic. There was a great group of doctors out in Marshfield—Dr. Epstein, Dr. Ben Lawton, Russ Lewis, George Magnin, Dean Emanuel. They all got together with me as I went to Congress. They said Mel, you should concentrate on health, medical research, and delivery of health services to people. That's an area that needs help and it needs understanding. We would appreciate it if you would make an all out effort to get on that committee. In the first term I had a little difficulty. I was assigned only as temporary member by John Taber because there wasn't a vacancy on the committee. But, I started going to those committee meetings as a temporary member at that time and it was a great eye opener for me. But really, it was the drive of those doctors there at the Marshfield Clinic that I've just named that were important in getting me to be on that committee.

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John had the same kind of support in Providence. There were doctors there, members of Brown University, in Providence that worked on John to get his interest and build it up. They were responsible, I think, for his going on that committee early on and he was very appreciative of their support all during the years.

Interviewer: To follow-up on that, his background was as a bricklayer, not in health.

Melvin Laird: I know he was a damn good brick layer too because I went around on a couple of jobs with him out in Wisconsin and he was teaching some of those guys the modern technique of brick laying. I remember when we were with the doctor from the McArdle Laboratory and John was sort of telling the guy the importance of brick laying as his job out in Rhode Island and Harold Rusch, the doctor in charge of the McArdle Cancer Clinic said well, I was a brick layer as a young man. John sort of scoffed at that and said well, what do you mean? How did you handle...on a cold winter day out in Wisconsin, how did you set the bricks on a corner if it was real cold? He said well, the way we did that, Dr. Rusch said, was we urinated on them and that made the set. John knew right away that here was a brick layer and he had a relationship with Howard Rusch and McArdle Cancer Clinic there in Madison...that was long remembered.

Interviewer: I read about these three important meetings in Wisconsin. That was the second meeting, yes?

Melvin Laird: Yes. That was the second...that was the second meeting.

Interviewer: What else transpired during that second visit?

Melvin Laird: Well, John questioned the whole set up of the Marshfield Clinic, interrogated those doctors (like) as they had never been interrogated before, finding out about the practice of so-called clinical medicine and of one of the first HMOs in the country. This was an HMO that was set up very early and was set up prior to any HMOs in the country and John was interested in it.

Interviewer: The No Match Bill was also discussed in that meeting wasn't it?

Melvin Laird: We discussed the No Match Grant for the University of Wisconsin and their hospital and the provisions were made for a No Match on the addition there at Madison. It was very important to the University Hospital that No Match be recognized. It meant a lot to Wisconsin and a lot to the University. But, the McArdle Center was one that was sponsored by John and by me, the whole center. That center was built in the form of a cancer cell as they saw it. It was a two story building. Wonderful work was carried on there for chemotherapy and drug use. And some important discoveries were made there that are still being used today. The center is still very active.

What John and I established...John used to call it the Lairdettes, but we established seven regional cancer centers in the United States. He always gave me the credit for the amendment, but it was his prodding that got me to put the amendment into committee. So, that's why he called it the Lairdettes.

Those cancer centers are Farber, [MD] Anderson in Texas, [Dana] Farber in Massachusetts, the University of Wisconsin...there are very important cancer centers that were established under that legislation. The most important ones nationally are probably Farber and the Anderson Clinic down in Texas. Additional aid was presented to them and provided for them for their work.

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Interviewer: There was a very famous quote that came out of the basement of the library by Dr. Ben Lawton. Can you describe that meeting for me?

Melvin Laird: I think that was on our first meeting. Dr. Lawton at that time was a very fine surgeon and president of the clinic—one of the finest, most dedicated doctors I've ever met in my life. Dr. Lawton felt that medicine without research was no medicine at all. And, he was a great person on pushing research and going in as far as the future of medicine was concerned. And that quote of Dr. Lawton's was always remembered by John Fogarty and by me.

Interviewer: Tell us the story of your last night with Mr. Fogarty and why you were in Washington that night.

Melvin Laird: In 1967, January, Congress was going to go into session. We had also planned to go to the [first] Super Bowl out in California. So we had made our plans that we would come to the start of the Congress and then go to California because Green Bay, which is in my area of Wisconsin, was playing in the Super Bowl. I thought it would be fun for us to be there. That night, the day before the session...John insisted on being there the day of the session. I felt we could have gotten sworn in out in California by a judge, a federal judge, which is perfectly permissible. John said no, "I want to be sworn in on the floor of the House of Representatives. We'll go to California that afternoon". Well, it so happens that John didn't make that next day for being sworn in for his very important [14<sup>th</sup>] term, that he thought was important for him to be there. We had dinner that night. I went back to his office, left my golf clubs there with the understanding that as soon as the session was over on that next day we would take off to see Green Bay play in the Super Bowl. John never made it. I just don't understand. We had a nice dinner that night and I went back to the office and everything was in fine shape. But, he had a very serious heart problem that evening. That was the end of John Fogarty and the end of a wonderful relationship and a great friendship.

Interviewer: May I ask if you recall what you were discussing at dinner? What would have been the next big accomplishment?

Melvin Laird: Well, at that time we were discussing...I was telling him about the changes we were going to make in the House Republican leadership and that we were moving Ford up to a different position. I would stay there as a Republican conference chairman. So, we did discuss a little republican policy because he was always interested in what was going on on my side of the aisle. He would always tell me what Mike Kirwan from Ohio was planning or what John McCormick was planning at that time. John McCormick was a great friend and Mike Kirwan from Ohio was a great friend of John's. I think his greatest friend, however, was Hugh Carey who became...later became governor of New York. Hugh used to join John and I for a little after hours drink together in John's office from time to time because he was such a good friend of John Fogarty's. He was a great member from New York, later went on to very important positions in New York.

Interviewer: So, you have taken us sort of to the end of your partnership. I'd like to take you back, not to the very beginning, but talk a bit about your committee work and how you did it. You ran two rammed through very hefty increases in medical research spending against opposition. Can you talk about your strategy and how you worked together to do that?

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Melvin Laird: Well, I came Congress the same year that James Shannon became director of NIH [1955]. So, we both started together as rather freshman. He was Director of NIH. I was a new member of the appropriations committee. John Fogarty and I got together and had a visit about this and how we should try to help Shannon in his new responsibilities. At that time, the budget of HEW for NIH—National Institutes of Health—was a few million dollars. It wasn't a big budget at the time because this had been a small group that moved from New York up to Washington. And the National Institutes of Health was just beginning to blossom and become a reality. Shannon had a very small laboratory there in New York. This was blossoming into a very big national, international laboratory as we envisioned it at that time, and as he envisioned it. During the period of time from 1953

until 1968...John died in '67. I left Congress to go to Defense in '68. Shannon retired. But, the greater growth of the National Institutes of Health was outstanding. There has never been an institution that has grown that rapidly as far as the budget was concerned. We went from those few million dollars in 1953 to \$1,500,000,000 in 1968—a tremendous increase in the amount of money made available for medical research. I think we spent it well. We created several new institutes. We enlarged the other institutes that were already in existence. I think it's a remarkable record of good growth of government for a very good reason.

As you know, we had to fight the administrations during this period because both the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations wanted less money than we appropriated. They were very much opposed to what we were doing. But John and I would always wait till the conference committee between the House and the Senate. There is where we set the goals for all areas of NIH—CDC...everything from syphilis relief and programs in that area all the way through. We'd take it one by one and go through and we put those increases in there above the administration. Now, we had to judge how far the administration would go without vetoing. There were people in the Senate that always felt a veto was good politics because you had a big issue then on these issues of cancer and heart disease and some of the other public issues. John Fogarty felt it was better to get action and so did I. So, we wanted to work a position that would be signed and become law and be effective in helping Jim Shannon build his great institution that we had envisioned for the United States.

Interviewer: How did you go about determining what those numbers would be?

Melvin Laird: Well, we had some friends over in the Bureau of the Budget. I had several good friends there. I also had a good friend in General [Wilton] Persons in the White House. I would always kind of run things off him. I had Bryce Harlow over there as a young man working for the General. I could always run things off them to see. They'd say, oh no, we can't go that far. What can you do? I'd kind of come back with a report about where we could be and we'd stretch it just a little bit. But, we always felt that we were in the ballgame. We weren't interested in playing politics with this. We wanted results and we got them.

Interviewer: Mr. Fogarty kept you very busy with hearings.

Melvin Laird: Oh yeah, he was a slave driver on hearings. He'd start at 8:30 in the morning and we'd go straight through until five in the evening. I was on the Defense Appropriations Committee too. They would meet in the morning. I would try to get to as many of the Defense Appropriations Committee's meetings as I could. But, I had to give priority to John because John would raise so much hell with me. George Mahon was Chairman of the Defense Committee, subcommittee at the time. He was a little easier on me and would excuse me to go to HEW meetings right through until '68.

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Interviewer: Why was he so focused on the importance of these hearings?

Melvin Laird: He felt that a hearing record was absolutely necessary in order to justify an increase in the budget. He wanted to be in a position where he had built a record that would show that the extra funds were needed, necessary, and could be spent properly.

Interviewer: Tell me again how you two had worked together when you were in conference committee.

Melvin Laird: Well, in the conference committee the Senate has one vote and the House has one vote. By John and I staying together always, we had a lock on the committee. The senators had different ideas. Margaret Chase Smith would have some and others would have other things. We always gave Margaret a little bit of hell about some of her most important problems. But, we stayed together. The Senate never was entirely together because they were always for more, more, more without regard to whether they'd become a practical program or not.

Interviewer: I've read that...this was in your biography. "The two men manipulated their subcommittee hearings like master puppeteers and that sometimes you might disagree with Mr. Fogarty but perhaps it was all staged..."

Melvin Laird: Well no. We'd try to show a difference of opinion in order to bring out something from a witness. We know that they had differences of opinion and Fogarty would take one side and I would take the other and we would be able to come down to a conclusion after the hearing was all over. But there was nothing improper about that. We did that because we felt that we could get to the truth faster that way.

Interviewer: Were you at times under pressure from other fellow Republicans for being in such a partnership?

Melvin Laird: I'm sure. I know I was. I mean they criticized me for going along on these increases. But, I was able to hold my own alright over on my side of the aisle and I never got in too much trouble. I got a lot of kidding about it, about the partnership. Sam Rayburn first recognized it then John McCormack recognized it. And, all succeeding speakers understood that Fogarty and I had a partnership when it came to HEW and Labor.

Interviewer: The record shows these tremendous accomplishments. Did you two ever disagree on things?

Melvin Laird: Oh yes. We disagreed sometimes. John was a little more liberal than I was, you know. You have to kind of work those things out, but we always came to an agreement.

Interviewer: I understand that you two, to help maintain this partnership, would campaign for each other at times in your home districts, which seemed...

Melvin Laird: We did. We did. I went out to his district and he went to mine, but that was a little unusual at that time. But, it was a matter of friendship. I had various other relationships like that, but not any of them as close as with John Fogarty. But it was great that the speaker always recognized it and my leadership always recognized it. Gerry Ford and Charlie Halleck used to give me

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the needle a little bit about it because they would be called by the White House—"can't you do something with Mel and get him to kind of cut back a little bit on this and be a little closer to the President's position?" It was kind of like Lyndon Johnson calling Gerry Ford on a different issue that had to do with defense. The tapes show that he called Gerry and said, "Gerry you've got to get down there and muzzle Mel Laird on Vietnam." I always took that as kind of a badge of honor.

Interviewer: Just to wrap up on this topic about your unique bipartisan relationship, you two were from opposite sides of the aisles...did you at the time ever talk about how unique this relationship was?

Melvin Laird: Oh sure we did. We talked about it. We'd have dinner together quite often. We had a group down at Paul Young's restaurant we met quite frequently. As a matter of fact, John and I had an advisory committee made up of some very important people. This was before Dave Packard became my deputy in defense, but he was chairman of the board at Hewlett Packard. He was on our advisory committee. He was on the board at Stanford University. Juan Trippe, who was president of the board of trustees at Yale, also had created Pan Am American Airlines was on our committee. I could go through and name these people, but they were helping us as far as their interests and their school's interest in research in the area of health care and research in medicine.

Interviewer: You had support from a lot of people—some in particular maybe you could comment on—Mary Lasker.

Melvin Laird: Well, Mary Lasker was a Wisconsiner—came from Wisconsin—and married an advertising man out in New York and did very well. They became very wealthy. They set up the Albert and Mary Lasker Medical Research Foundation to promote medical research throughout the United States. This little Wisconsin girl kind of blossomed out in New York this became a very fine affair and she helped support people that she felt would be interested in this area. As a matter of fact, she and Mrs. [Alice] Fordyce would make campaign contributions to some members of the Congress. I never took a campaign contribution from either one of them because I had a campaign manager, chairman of my campaign, Bob Froehlke who later became Secretary of the Army, and he wouldn't accept a dollar from outside of Wisconsin. So, we never got any of that New York money in my campaigns.

Interviewer: Some of your expert witnesses you'd bring into your hearings were tied to NIH. I wondered if you could comment on Dr. Michael DeBakey and what that relationship was like?

Melvin Laird: Well, DeBakey and [Sidney] Farber and some of those people, Howard Rusk up at the rehabilitation center in New York, they were outstanding leaders in the field. They were always willing to help us when it came time to work on support for the positions we were taking. We'd always call them before the committee. We would go over their questions somewhat with them. With Shannon, we'd go over his appearances a little bit beforehand and have kind of a little mock session sometimes with him because we didn't want him to be caught unaware either. We wanted him to know that we were doing what we could to build this international center there in Bethesda. But, we did work closely with them. I think that Dr. Shannon said as he was leaving NIH, that he didn't know how he would have gotten along without the Fogarty/Laird partnership.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the WHO [World Health Organization] meetings? What was your role there?

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Melvin Laird: Well, our role there at that particular time, had to do with pure water—water supplies for people and how important that was to health, and also to close in on the chicken pox and small pox as well as the polio vaccine programs. We wanted a program of universal inoculation paid for by the federal government...taking this vaccine that had been developed and making it available throughout the United States and the world.

Interviewer: Paint the picture for me of the founding of the library [National Library of Medicine].

Melvin Laird: Well, the library, the National Library of Medicine, was a project that we were very interested in. There were several people that were pushing us in that area. Among them were DeBakey, Farber, and some of those great key witnesses we had for other areas of NIH. We had the support of the American Medical Association. We had good support on that project and we funded it in our appropriation bill. As you know, we had the ground breaking for the Library of Medicine in 1959. I was there at the groundbreaking. As a matter of fact, if you look at the pictures, I'm the only living American that's still around that was at that ceremony. I'm not sure how long I'm going to be around, but it's nice to know that I was there and had an appreciation for one of the great things that has happened to medicine in the world. People all over the world can tune in on various diseases, on operations—how they're performed, some of the new medical equipment and machinery. Some of the new discoveries are all available almost the day after they are discovered. It's (That's) an amazing wealth of information not only of medical research, but how to keep people living longer and better.

Interviewer: Am I correct that Dr. Shannon initially didn't want that to be part of NIH?

Melvin Laird: At that time he thought that it would take away from NIH. But, we felt it should be at NIH. He went along with it being there. It was under his authority for about three or four years before he left. He treated it well.

Interviewer: Did you work closely with Dr. Martin Cummings who was the director of the library?

Melvin Laird: I worked with him, yes. I have great respect for the work he has done. Well, he was a great promoter of the library. He's done a tremendous job. The success of that library is due mainly to his perseverance and his leadership.

Interviewer: You also authorized the funding of the Lister Hill Center for Biomedical Research.

Melvin Laird: Yes. Well, Lister Hill was a very important person as far as health care was concerned. His father had been a doctor, as you know. We thought that it was something very worthwhile and it should be named after him, just as I thought the International Center for Fogarty should be named after him. I insisted upon that from the day after Fogarty passed away. I went to the floor of the House of the Representatives. We had gone forward with the Lister Hill thing. It was absolutely fitting and proper that the International Medical Program at NIH bear the name of John Fogarty. John Fogarty was always interested in the worldwide application of medical research that came from his association with WHO. He attended six of those meetings, of WHO, the international meetings, and he always felt that getting together and having a depository for all of this information was very important. He felt that this was an important aspect of the growth of NIH through these

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programs and that the international program was very much needed and necessary, and that the United States should take the lead in that area.

Interviewer: Tell me the story again, the day after he died.

Melvin Laird: Well, the day after he passed away we had a special session of the Congress in which people could come together and talk about John. That is the first time that I presented the idea of the International [Center]... I got some of the suggestions from NIH as to what would be the fitting, proper recognition of John Fogarty. And all of them agreed in that short period of time that this would be the best thing that we could do in the name of John Fogarty. So, I went forward with it. The outline of the program is almost word for word. The resolution was signed by President Johnson [in 1968]. Because that was John's dream.

Interviewer: There was a recent New York Times article by William Broad called "Billionaires with Big Ideas are Privatizing American Science" talking about the move away from government funding in medical research. I'd love to know your thoughts. Are the days of the United States government being at the forefront of funding medical research coming to an end or have they come to an end?

Melvin Laird: I certainly hope they haven't...the best way to fund this medical research is through the government. Certainly the pharmaceutical companies, the medical profession, and all the people together should understand that the best place to put their money is in the National Institutes of Health and this worldwide organization that we have built up here through the Library of Medicine and through those institutes out there. There's nothing like it in the world. Don't try to duplicate it. Keep that thing going and concentrate on doing your research through that organization.

Interviewer: We can move away from NIH just for a moment and talk about some of the other outcomes of your partnership with John Fogarty.

Melvin Laird: Well you know, John was a great friend of the chairman and CEO of the Retired Teachers Association, Dr. [Ethel] Andrus. She became quite a friend of mine. She decided that the Retired Teachers Association should be broadened and should go forward with all retired people, people of the aging group, and that the best thing for her to do was to merge with another organization that had just gotten started—the American Association of Retired People. So, she came to us and wanted us to help in that merger she had proposed. So, we agreed to do everything we could to promote that merger. We were at the convention where the merger took place. John was one key-note and I was the other. We were the two co-keynote speakers at the Salt Lake City Convention when the Retired Teachers Association of America joined up with the AARP.

Now, it was decided at that convention that we drop the retired teachers and make it AARP for all groups. That was the right decision because this new group takes in all retirees. Hell, I'm 92 right now. Who thought that people would be living that long? It's going to become more and more important. So, those associations have to be thought of carefully. They have to be responsible though. They cannot be for free lunches. You've got to pay for government services. You have to be willing to pay taxes to pay the piper. I think that sometimes they should realize that government does cost money. You've got to be willing to pay for it, but you want to make sure your dollar is used properly. That's the important thing.

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Interviewer: Rather than sort of throw out other outcomes of your partnership, ...are there other topics you would like to talk about?

Melvin Laird: Well you know, I'd like to give John credit for a lot of things. He understood my position on working for the All-Volunteer Service. He never really got involved in it, but he did understand it. One of my most important accomplishments has been the All-Volunteer Service. It's in its 41<sup>st</sup> year now. From 1939 until 1970 the only way we would fill manpower requirements was through the draft. Now, we have the volunteer service and it's working well. I'm so pleased with that.

Now John was interested also in a medical school that was developed. The author of the bill when John was there was a guy by the name of Eddy Herbert [F. Edward Herbert] from Louisiana. He had this bill in all during the time that John and I were in this area and never got it any place. When I became Secretary of Defense, the armed forces medical uniformed...University for Medicine was established there in Bethesda. I don't know if you're familiar with it or not, but it's a good school. Our doctors now come from there. We had to have a school because we were using the draft as a means of getting doctors. We gave people who went to medical school a deferment if they agreed to serve so many years. We didn't have that anymore. So, you had to have this school. This school is something that is working out well. It's right there in Bethesda and it's doing very well. John would have been proud of it. He was for Eddy Herbert's bill, but Eddy Herbert could never get it moving. He got it moving in 1969 when the Air Force Academy was playing down in the Sugar Bowl. I was down there as Secretary of Defense. He cornered me and I said Eddy, I'll see that that's done. One of my projects as Secretary was to establish that school and get it through the Congress. I think that's been a good thing.

Interviewer: What could Congress today learn from you and John Fogarty?

Melvin Laird: If you want to get something done, work together.

END OF INTERVIEW