

C. William O'Neill and the 1958 Right-to-Work Amendment

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation with distinction in History in
the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Michael B. Hissam

The Ohio State University
June 2005

Project Adviser: Professor David L. Stebenne, Department of History

INTRODUCTION*

“No employer or labor organization shall deny or abridge the right to work by requiring membership or non-membership in, or payment or non-payment of money in, a labor organization as a condition of employment or continued employment in this state. All agreements in conflict with this section are, to the extent of such conflict, unlawful and of no effect in this state.”

--Official Ohio Ballot Language, Issue No. 2, November 1958

It was these simple words on the Ohio ballot in 1958 that set off one of the most divisive political battles in Ohio history. After millions of dollars, a massive voter registration drive, and the onslaught of modern campaign techniques, “Right-to-Work” (RTW) in Ohio lost by nearly a million votes, which at the time was one of the worst defeats for a ballot issue in the state’s history. In the same election, C. William O’Neill, a Ohio Republican *wunderkind* who had already been Speaker of the House and a three-term attorney general before the age of forty, also went down to a resounding defeat. This study is a look at how C. William O’Neill’s career and the RTW issue converged in a disastrous political defeat that reshaped Ohio’s political landscape for decades to come.

In November 1956, Ray C. Bliss, chairman of the Ohio Republican Party, had the state’s Republicans in line for what seemed like an unstoppable domination of Ohio’s affairs throughout the 1960s and beyond. By November 1958, almost all of Bliss’s Republican candidates, including longtime United States Senator John W. Bricker and Attorney General William Saxbe, had been sent home by Ohio voters, and solid Republican majorities in both houses of the Ohio General Assembly had been lost. In between these two polar worlds for the Ohio Republicans lay two turbulent years, where political decisions were made that had a profound and lasting importance for Ohio’s political history.

* © Michael B. Hissam, 2005, Columbus, Ohio.

C. William O'Neill, who is the only person in Ohio's history to serve as the head of all three branches of state government, is one of the most understudied figures in Ohio history. No biography of O'Neill currently exists, and this period of Ohio history is largely brushed over in works on Ohio politics as an "interregnum" between the more well-known administrations of Governors Frank J. Lausche and James A. Rhodes.¹ Even when considering works done in other fields, the only published work on O'Neill and RTW is political scientist John H. Fenton's short 1959 article, "The Right-to-Work Vote in Ohio."² Although O'Neill only served as governor for two years (as the last governor with a two-year term), his administration coincided with a period in which Ohio appeared to be on the brink of unprecedented expansion and economic success. By 1958, Ohio's economic outlook had changed dramatically. Therefore, an examination of the failed O'Neill administration is also a helpful look at the structural changes that Ohio experienced in the late 1950s.

Ohio's postwar political history in general remains largely unwritten. The lack of an adequate general history of Ohio since 1945 forces those interested in the topic to rely on biographies of Ohio's most prominent political figures. While the amount of biographical material available to students of the period has increased in the last fifteen years, much of the work done in the field has been done by journalists or political scientists, not by professional historians. Furthermore, not all important postwar political figures in Ohio (O'Neill, for example) have been studied, meaning that the picture is often incomplete.³

¹ Mike Curtin, "The O'Neill-DiSalle Years, 1957-1963," in *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994) 42.

² John H. Fenton, "The Right-to-Work Vote in Ohio," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 3 (August 1959): 241-253.

³ The most helpful general work in the field is *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994) 1-180, which includes eight brief historical chapters by journalists as an introduction to the topic. In terms of biographies, see Richard G. Zimmerman, *Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael V. DiSalle* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 2003); Richard O. Davies, *Defender of the Old Guard: John Bricker and American Politics* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1993); James T. Patterson, *Mr.*

RTW has received slightly more attention from academic historians, but the issue's stagnancy in politics today has made RTW a less-discussed historical topic. Gilbert J. Gall's 1988 study on the national political battle over RTW is still the best work available on RTW. Gall's book, which covers the RTW battle from 1943 until 1979, goes a long way toward explaining the political implications of RTW battles, but its wide focus leaves little room for a detailed analysis of state-level battles over RTW. Gall focuses his discussion of the six state battles over RTW in 1958 on California, only to then conclude that "in Ohio, the campaign was similar."⁴ Yet, the Ohio experience with RTW was emphatically not like California's, where RTW was introduced in the fall of 1957 as an important political issue in the Republican gubernatorial primary, and where United States Senator William Knowland was tied to RTW from the beginning. For those looking to understand RTW's development and implications with respect to Ohio, examining the issue with California in mind will lead to errant conclusions. In Ohio, RTW developed as a 1958 campaign issue through a different route, and Ohio Republicans only became entangled with RTW at the very end of its development as a political issue. Furthermore, while California was likely a more heavily unionized state, it was Ohio voters who rejected RTW by a larger percentage of the vote.⁵ The California RTW battle has achieved far more attention than Ohio's experience with RTW, probably due to the protracted fight over the issue there and California's status as a larger state, but it is the Ohio RTW fight that is the more

Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Also, see Richard O. Davies, "John W. Bricker and the Slow Death of Old Guard Republicanism," and William Russell Coil, "James A. Rhodes and the 1960s Origin of Contemporary Ohio," both in *Builders of Ohio: A Biographical History*, Warren Van Tine and Michael Pierce, eds., (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 2003).

⁴ Gilbert J. Gall, *The Politics of Right to Work: The Labor Federations as Special Interests, 1943-1979* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988) 111-13; In addition to Gall's work, see Alan Draper, *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967* (New York: Praeger, 1989), and, for a background of postwar labor conflict, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2003).

⁵ The data on union membership as a percent of the population is not reliable enough to know for sure whether Ohio or California was more heavily unionized. Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 118.

interesting of the two.⁶ In Ohio, the Republicans in charge were thrown out of office even though they did not introduce RTW as an issue like Knowland did in California. What the Ohio version of RTW allows historians to do is to examine RTW and its effect on the 1958 election without the prejudicial impact of Knowland's controversial involvement with the issue. In Ohio, we can see the role RTW played in a more typical political environment.

The slow rate at which new works have been published in the field of Ohio politics and the history of RTW means that research materials that have only recently become available have largely remained unused by academic historians. In the nearly twenty years since Gall's work on RTW was published, for example, several more archival collections have become available to researchers. In terms of Ohio's specific experience with RTW, John Fenton did not have access to any archival materials when he published his work on O'Neill and RTW in Ohio. Today, both the C. William O'Neill Papers, opened in 2004, and the voluminous records of the Ohio AFL-CIO greatly expand the resources available to students of this period of Ohio's history.

In addition, the focus of the existing literature on Ohio, O'Neill, and RTW has limited its usefulness in developing fine conclusions. While Gall's seminal work remains important, his main focus was on national unions, not Ohio, and his exposure to Ohio-related research materials was limited. On the other hand, Ohio journalists like Michael Curtin and Richard G. Zimmerman, who have penned histories of this period in Ohio politics, have largely ignored the national RTW issue and the role of national unions in the dispute. In Curtin and Zimmerman's studies of Ohio, RTW only appears as an easy method of explaining O'Neill's defeat in the 1958 elections. Only recently have enough research materials become available for a more inclusive

⁶ See, for example, Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 111-113; Totton J. Anderson, "The 1958 Election in California," *Western Political Science Quarterly* 12, no. 1, Part 2 (March 1959): 276-300; and Gayle B. Montgomery and James W. Johnson, in collaboration with Paul G. Manolis, *One Step from the White House: The Rise and Fall of Senator William F. Knowland* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998) 228-54.

look at O'Neill's defeat, the Ohio RTW battle, and the political history of the time. This study is an attempt at such an examination of these issues. By relying on a broader swath of research materials—labor union archives, the files of public relations consultants who fought against RTW, the O'Neill papers, newspaper accounts, and the fifty years of secondary sources that have been produced on these topics since 1958—the goal is to produce a richer, more accurate explanation of the career of C. William O'Neill, how RTW came to be in Ohio, and how O'Neill and the RTW issue intersected in a disastrous political blunder that was the only defeat of O'Neill's forty-year political career.

I. OHIO'S BOY WONDER

On the evening of February 14, 1956, C. William O'Neill addressed a small group of friends and supporters in Marietta to announce his candidacy for governor of Ohio. It was Valentine's Day, as well as O'Neill's fortieth birthday. The emotional gratitude that O'Neill had for his hometown was clear. "No one, not in my situation," O'Neill told his supporters, "can appreciate my feelings on this occasion. To this place and to you people gathered here and listening in tonight I owe everything."⁷ The landscape of this small Ohio River town was littered with the landmarks of O'Neill's formative days. Referring to Marietta's position as the birthplace of the Northwest Territory, O'Neill drew a metaphor to Marietta's role in his own development while enumerating his ties to the city: "I trained my mind at Marietta College. Across the street on my right I received my religious instruction Two blocks down Putnam Street one chilly morning before dawn, I boarded a bus as a rookie private, bound for the Armed Forces."⁸

⁷ "Remarks of C. William O'Neill for Release," 14 February 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Governor's Correspondence, 1956-1958, Illness Letters and Press Releases," 1.

⁸ "Remarks of C. William O'Neill for Release," 14 February 1956, CWOP, OHS 1.

The emotional rhetoric in O'Neill's speech swelled as he continued his personal message. Reminding his listeners of his twelve years of representation of Marietta in the state legislature, O'Neill made his point clear: "These and a thousand other memories swell up in me tonight. I found my wife here, my children were born here, my ancestors are buried in this place. This is home. I came home tonight to embark on the greatest undertaking of my life."⁹ There was no exaggeration in O'Neill's claim. If elected, O'Neill would become the youngest governor elected by the people of Ohio since a forty-one-year-old Thomas Worthington became the fifth governor of Ohio in 1814, a remarkable feat even for this political *wunderkind*.

Regardless of the outcome of the 1956 gubernatorial race, O'Neill had already staked a claim as one of the most promising political figures in the state. O'Neill was born in 1916 to a longtime Washington County justice of the peace, Charles T. O'Neill and his wife Jessie O'Neill. Charles O'Neill was born in Washington County in 1869, and it was his father who had arrived in the Ohio River Valley direct from Ireland in the nineteenth century to work as a laborer. Charles and Jessie, who also was a native of Washington County, named their first born "C. William," but the initial did not stand for Charles (or anything else), and "C. William" became "Billy" as a youngster.¹⁰ O'Neill had just one brother, Daniel, who was four years younger, and the O'Neill household became even smaller when O'Neill's mother died when he was just four years old. While growing up, O'Neill had been surrounded by the twin environments of both law and politics. O'Neill's father had served as justice of the peace for forty-eight years and as an attorney for sixty-two years, both of which were records for length of service when the younger O'Neill began his ascent to political power. Charles O'Neill often told his son that he had married 3,000 Washington County couples during his time as justice of the

⁹ "Remarks of C. William O'Neill for Release," 14 February 1956, CWOP, OHS 1.

¹⁰ Dud Chamberlain, "A Prophecy Haunts Democrats," *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18.

peace, and depending on the marriage outcome had thereby “gained or lost his son 6,000 votes.”¹¹

O’Neill’s young life seems to have been almost entirely geared towards eventual political success. O’Neill liked to recall that during a 1924 Marietta campaign stop, “Honest” Vic Donahey, Democratic governor of Ohio, had told the young O’Neill that someday he too would be governor. A newspaper portrait of O’Neill later explained:

Billy O’Neill sincerely believed Honest Vic and from that day, O’Neill’s family and intimates attest, the lad’s life seemed to have but one firmly-fixed goal. A governor had promised him, and he intended that promise to be fulfilled.¹²

O’Neill attended Marietta public schools, where his interest in leadership was developed. To make up for his un-athletic physique, O’Neill poured all of his energies into other activities, such as his academic work and competitive debate. During his high school days, the principal of Marietta High School, A. D. Rupp, was also the debate coach. Rupp “took a fancy” to the highly-driven O’Neill and moved into a role as O’Neill’s mentor that would be life-long. When it came to debate, “Bill practiced long and hard, blossomed splendidly and soon became one of the most effective debaters the school ever had.” O’Neill trained his voice, perfected his timing, and for a short man, developed a “surprising volume.”¹³ During O’Neill’s senior year, Rupp coached the young talent to victory in the state debate tournament championship.¹⁴

An undergraduate education at Marietta College, a small, private liberal arts college with a fine academic reputation, brought more success to the future politician. O’Neill joined the Delta Upsilon fraternity chapter at Marietta College. Delta Upsilon was one of the oldest

¹¹ S. Winifred Smith, “C. William O’Neill, 1957-1959,” in *The Governors of Ohio*, 2nd ed., (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1969), 201-203; For quote, see Robert Ruth, “Justice O’Neill Dies at Age 62,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, 1.

¹² Chamberlain, “A Prophecy Haunts Democrats,” *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18.

¹³ Chamberlain, “A Prophecy Haunts Democrats,” *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18.

¹⁴ Michael F. Curtin and Julia Barry Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1996) 55.

fraternities in the United States, counting among its pledges President James A. Garfield, United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes, Justice Stephen J. Field, Joseph P. Kennedy, and a Marietta-born member of the Marietta College chapter, Republican Charles G. Dawes, who had been a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, vice president of the United States, and the ambassador to Great Britain.¹⁵ In addition to his continued involvement with the debate team, O'Neill sought leadership roles, serving as the president of his high school class, each of his college classes, student senate, and of his fraternity.¹⁶ O'Neill never let his extracurricular activities interrupt his academic work, and after finishing second in his class at Marietta High School, he graduated *cum laude* from Marietta College in 1938, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa upon graduation.¹⁷ That same year, this ambitious twenty-two-year-old mounted his first bid for public office. O'Neill was without a doubt one of Southeast Ohio's brightest prospects. In 1938, O'Neill was elected to the Ohio House of Representatives, at just one year over the minimum voting age, and at that point became the youngest person ever to serve in the lower chamber of the Ohio legislature. O'Neill completed his legal training at the Ohio State University Law School in Columbus during his first two terms in the Ohio House, and was admitted by examination to the Ohio bar on August 7, 1942.¹⁸

O'Neill was reelected by Washington County voters five times in a row. In the meantime, he managed to squeeze in military service in the Second World War as a private under the command of General George S. Patton, Jr., in Europe.¹⁹ O'Neill's 1956 campaign materials trumpeted his voluntary military service and the three battle stars he received for his

¹⁵ Delta Upsilon International Fraternity, *History*, <http://www.deltatau.org/history.asp>; Also see "O'Neill, C. William," *Moore's Who's Who in Ohio: 1961* (Los Angeles: Moore's Who's Who Publications, 1961), 286.

¹⁶ Chamberlain, "A Prophecy Haunts Democrats," *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18.

¹⁷ Marjorie Dent Candee, ed., *Current Biography Yearbook: 1958* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1958), 319-321.

¹⁸ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 55; For O'Neill's bar admission information, see "C. William O'Neill," Supreme Court Of Ohio, Public Attorney Information Database, http://www.sconet.state.oh.us/Atty_Reg/Public_AttorneyDsetails.asp?ID=0057819.

¹⁹ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 55.

service. One advertisement explained that, although he was exempt from the draft, O'Neill enlisted to serve with the 976th Engineers, and that after being reelected *in absentia* to the Ohio House, his captain administered "the oath of office during the Battle of the Bulge."²⁰ O'Neill's military service was important in a time where Americans were still living under the large shadow cast by the Second World War. A record of military service was becoming a prerequisite for younger politicians in the 1950s. Amazingly, O'Neill managed to find a wife in the midst of all his other activities. In 1945, O'Neill married a *Marietta Times* proofreader and daughter of a local grocer named Betty Hewson.²¹ Less than a year after his discharge from the Army, O'Neill was selected by his fellow legislators as the youngest-ever Speaker of the Ohio House at age thirty, and later served as Minority Floor Leader when the Democrats won majorities in the House. In the House, O'Neill sat on the Finance Committee, the Rules and Judiciary Committee, and the Committee on Interstate Commerce, in addition to chairing a study on state government salaries.²²

In 1950, O'Neill continued to set records with his election as the youngest attorney general in Ohio's history (at age thirty-four). In his first statewide appearance on the ballot, O'Neill captured forty-six percent of the votes in a three-candidate Republican primary, and fifty-three percent of the vote in the general election against the incumbent Democrat, Herbert S. Duffy. To top off his victory over that incumbent, O'Neill's 1.4 million votes in the general election surpassed the total number of votes received by his party's candidate for governor that year, Don H. Ebright. In his three terms as attorney general, O'Neill matched his obvious preference for a young, motivated staff with ambitious and fresh ideas. O'Neill added to his

²⁰ "Bill O'Neill for Governor" Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign," 1; Also, see "Meet Bill O'Neill: Republican Candidate for Governor" Pamphlet, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign."

²¹ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 55.

²² Candee, *Current Biography Yearbook*, 320.

resume during his time as Ohio's Attorney General. In 1952, O'Neill was first admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States. Two years later, he was elected as the one-year president of the National Association of Attorneys General. In addition, O'Neill pleased the more liberal members of his party with his July 1956 opinion that the Ohio State Board of Education had the authority to withhold state funds from downstate school districts that continued to allow racial segregation.²³

Already a former professor at Marietta College, the recipient of two honorary degrees, one of the "ten outstanding young men" in the country according to the national Junior Chamber of Commerce, a Freemason, a Baptist, a veteran, and a father of two, O'Neill's resume seemed that of a far older, more seasoned politician.²⁴ O'Neill was also a dedicated family man. By the time he ran for governor, Bill and Betty had two children, Charles William, age nine, and Peggy Elizabeth, age five. A black-and-white campaign photograph of the O'Neill family in 1956 was a fitting portrayal for this Baby Boom generation politician. The O'Neill family was made for marketing to a 1950s public: two children, slightly chubby and freckled, mom and dad, and smiles all around.²⁵

As this long list of accomplishments might suggest, the "friendly and approachable" O'Neill had a dynamic and affable personality. O'Neill, who had trained himself to recall thousands of faces after only one meeting, had "enhanced his personable traits with a studied cultivation of politics as a science."²⁶ A serious dedication to his work came in tandem with his affability. An energetic youngster, O'Neill worked hard, long hours. A newspaper report from

²³ Smith, "C. William O'Neill, 1957-1959," 201; Candee, *Current Biography Yearbook*, 321.

²⁴ "O'Neill, C. William," in *Ohio Lives: The Buckeye State Biographical Record*, ed. Clyde Hissong (Hopkinsville, KY: Historical Record Association, 1968), 414; Also, see "Bill O'Neill for Governor" Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign," 1-2; and Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 55, 63, 187, 190; Candee, *Current Biography Yearbook*, 321.

²⁵ Chamberlain, "A Prophecy Haunts Democrats," *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18; Also, see photograph in CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Letters of Endorsement" Folder.

²⁶ "Billy O'Neill Finally Takes Long Count," *The Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1958, 28.

1958 explained that O'Neill "does not golf, fish, or hunt," and that O'Neill had always "worked tirelessly until all hours and ate if and when time allowed."²⁷ O'Neill did not cast an imposing profile like many of the politicians of his era. On the contrary, he was a "short, stocky man with sharp blue eyes and a friendly smile."²⁸ His height of five feet and four inches and his grinning, boyish appearance made him appear good-natured and affable.²⁹ As seen by the voters (and as his campaign materials suggested), O'Neill was a caricature of the can-do optimism that filled the postwar era. Although he was a World War II veteran, he was young and energetic.

Although he had high ambitions and worked long hours, he was a devoted family man. Perhaps more than anyone else in the public eye in Ohio during the 1950s, Bill O'Neill embodied the youthful spirit of the day that seemed to proclaim that he could do anything and everything.

Alan Ehrenhalt, writing about 1957, has called these postwar hyperactive people "joiners." In Ehrenhalt's view, World War II was "a confidence builder" for the generation of political leaders that was coming to dominate the late 1950s. The "joiners" took their youthful postwar optimism and energy and poured into it social and political involvement. Ehrenhalt explains that these people "joined and volunteered for clubs and social organizations with an energy that seems in retrospect to have bordered on the manic."³⁰

Being bright and energetic was not, however, sufficient for the kind of meteoric political success in the 1950s that O'Neill enjoyed. Other factors were necessary for star power.

Television, which O'Neill's 1956 campaign heavily emphasized, was beginning to dominate political communication. Unlike some politicians, whose dark, shadowy faces (and equally dark

²⁷ "Billy O'Neill Finally Takes Long Count," *The Plain Dealer*, 28.

²⁸ "Sketches of Governors Elected," *New York Times*, 8 November 1956, p. 36.

²⁹ Candee, *Current Biography*, 321; There is some discrepancy in descriptions of O'Neill's height, ranging from five-feet-four to five-feet-six. Compare Curtin, "The O'Neill-DiSalle Era, 1957-1963," 43, to Richard G. Zimmerman, *Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael V. DiSalle* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 2003) 106.

³⁰ Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Lost City: The Forgotten Virtues of Community in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995) 214-216, 219.

demeanors) did not translate well to the new medium, O'Neill was more of a natural on the small screen. His face was light in tone, youthful-looking, and in his 1956 campaign materials did not look a bit tired despite his multiple activities. His short stature was less of an issue on television, where faces dominated, than on train platforms or large stages. As a hard-working state high school debate champion, a trained attorney, and a seasoned state legislator, O'Neill was clearly a gifted and well-trained public speaker. In an era in which communications were rapidly advancing, a candidate's speaking ability could make the difference between success and failure. In addition, it should be noted that the "public speaking" bar had historically been set at a low level in Ohio politics. Robert Taft, who was infamous for his response that Ohioans should "eat less" when asked about a meat shortage, was cold and distant in public; five-term Governor Frank Lausche often gave heavy, disorganized speeches; and while John W. Bricker was a fine speaker and debate team veteran like O'Neill, the Old Guard Republican's strongly conservative politics made him less than a star when it came to popular communications.³¹

O'Neill also had the necessary political and social requirements for popular electoral success in the 1950s. He had the virtue of Irish descent (with clearly an Irish name), while he was actually a Protestant. In a state where separate voting for each office had made candidates' names extremely important, O'Neill's name was surely a benefit in the diverse, increasingly Catholic state that Ohio was becoming by the late-1950s. In a generation known for its regular worship, O'Neill's campaign materials explained that Sunday mornings found the O'Neill family in church, and O'Neill's community activities included roles as director of Columbus Area

³¹ For O'Neill's public speaking skills, see Robert Ruth, "Justice O'Neill Dies at Age 62," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, 1; For Taft, see Tom Diemer, "Ohio in Washington: The Congressional Delegation," in *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994) 199; For Lausche, see Brian Usher, "The Lausche Era, 1945-1957," in *Ohio Politics*, 23; For Bricker, see Richard O. Davies, *Defender of the Old Guard: John Bricker and American Politics* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1993) xi, 10-11.

Council of Churches and as a trustee of the Ohio Baptist Convention.³² O'Neill's father had been a trustee of the Baptist Church in Marietta, and a young C. William O'Neill had organized Marietta's first chapter of the Baptist's Young People's Union when he had still lived at home.³³ There is no doubt that Billy O'Neill's name would have served him well in the heavily Catholic wards of Northeast Ohio, just as his Baptist affiliation was surely a political benefit downstate.

Politically, O'Neill was a moderate, cast from the mold of Eisenhower's "Modern Republicanism." O'Neill first served at as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1956, where he would have been able to soak up the many ideas that differentiated Eisenhower Republicanism from the Old Guard Republicanism that was more often associated with Ohio. As O'Neill's policy proposals in the 1956 campaign show, he did not have inhibitions about government entering into affairs when citizens were ill-equipped to act. He foresaw a strong governmental role in regulating the environment, caring for the mentally ill, and improving the state's educational system. He was not a segregationist, and his opinion as attorney general to withhold funds from segregating school district reflects an even more liberal, forward-looking approach than Eisenhower's. Aware of how Lausche's crime-fighting record was a key ingredient of his political success, O'Neill was equally tough on crime. A maxim in Ohio politics held that to be governor one needed the headline-grabbing exposure of one of two offices: auditor or attorney general.³⁴ O'Neill chose the latter, and his record on crime during his time as attorney general was perceived as tough, yet progressive. While attorney general, O'Neill crafted a new Ohio narcotics law (passed by the General Assembly in 1955), which was

³² O'Neill identified in his younger days as a Baptist, but later in his life he became a lay leader of the First Community Church in Columbus, a non-denominational, Christian church; See, "Meet Bill O'Neill: Republican Candidate for Governor" Pamphlet, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign"; Also, "O'Neill, C. William," in *Ohio Lives*, 414.

³³ Chamberlain, "A Prophecy Haunts Democrats," *Columbus Citizen Magazine*, 22 January 1956, 18.

³⁴ For the importance of the offices of auditor and attorney general, see Richard G. Zimmerman, "Rhodes First Eight Years, 1963-1971,"; and for Lausche's crime-fighting record, see Brian Usher, "The Lausche Era, 1945-1957," both in *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994), 62-63.

hailed by many as the best such law in the nation, and was “instrumental in outlining a program linking federal and state facilities for the treatment of narcotic addicts.”³⁵ O’Neill was an anti-communist, but was not perceived as sharing the irresponsible tactics of Joseph McCarthy. In a similar fashion, O’Neill was able to walk a fine line on divisive social issues, such as free speech. For example, O’Neill had argued unsuccessfully in front of the Supreme Court of the United States for the censorship of the Fritz Lang film “M” on the basis that it was “sacrilegious,” and he was celebrated by Ohioans (especially Catholic Ohioans) as having taken a sensible stand on the matter.³⁶

O’Neill’s Eisenhower-like moderation was novel in the context of Ohio politics. Unlike Eisenhower’s famous Ohio foes in the United State Senate—Old Guard Republican John Bricker and Mr. Republican Robert A. Taft—O’Neill’s politics did not stand in marked opposition to Eisenhower’s. In 1956, O’Neill ran on a platform that called for a vigorous, active, and energetic Republican Party in Ohio, staffed with young, family men, and geared towards the future. While Bricker and Taft often deservedly served as caricatures for a nostalgic longing for the past, it is a mistake to place O’Neill in their company. O’Neill might have been a lifelong Republican from a heavily-Republican Southeastern Ohio county, but he was no more an Old Guard, isolationist Republican than he was a “New Right” Republican in the design of Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Instead, O’Neill’s Republican politics were decidedly middle-of-the-road.

O’Neill’s personal background lay in Marietta, one hundred miles to the southeast of the state capital in Columbus, and part of a region of Appalachia known for its extreme poverty. Yet, Marietta is quite distinguishable from the rest of rural Southeastern Ohio. Marietta, a small

³⁵ Candee, *Current Biography Yearbook*, 320-321.

³⁶ *Superior Films, Inc. v. Department of Education of Ohio, Division of Film Censorship* (346 U.S. 587, 1954). The censorship of “sacrilegious” films by both Ohio and New York was struck down by the Supreme Court in a Per Curiam opinion.

city located at a bend where the Muskingum River joins the Ohio River, is uniquely un-Ohioan.³⁷ Marietta has an old-line spirit that is the direct result of its early inhabitants being wealthy New England migrants. In Ohio terms, Marietta was a closer cousin to Worthington, Ohio, just north of Columbus, than any other city found in the state's southern parts. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Marietta had become the "commercial and intellectual center" of the northwest frontier. As the most important stop for river traffic between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, Marietta attracted a budding intellectual and social life. Harman Blennerhassett, a wealthy Irish renaissance man, made his residence in Marietta during the 1790s, while waiting for his mansion—replete with a ballroom, laboratory, and library—to be built slightly downriver on his own private island in the Ohio River.³⁸ Complete with brick streets, beautiful churches, libraries, and an early public school system, Marietta today is still more like New England than any other area of Ohio. Marietta is neatly organized around a riverfront that once served as an important stop for America's river-dependent transportation system. In a reference to the old-fashioned phraseology of "laying out" a corpse for burial, Mark Twain is rumored to have commented that Marietta was "a dead town, but it's lain out nice." Marietta's pedestrian-friendly streets, brick riverfront, restaurants, and boutiques are a far cry from the urban Cleveland that produced Frank Lausche or the more typically Midwestern, flat farmlands of John Bricker's origins.

Furthermore, Marietta had always been linked to old and established influence and money. It was George Washington, surveyor of the mid-Ohio River valley in his youth before eventually owning a large part of the region's land (and for whom Washington County is

³⁷ The discussion of Marietta is drawn from the author's own experience and from visits to O'Neill's boyhood home in February 2005.

³⁸ Blennerhassett Island later became the setting for the alleged conspiracy hatched between Aaron Burr, Blennerhassett and others to overthrow the federal government. E. O. Randall, "Blennerhassett," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 1 (1887): 127-29, 131-32.

named), who told General Rufus Putnam of the beautiful scenes he had discovered in the mid-Ohio River Valley. The names of the Connecticut aristocratic families whom Putnam led into the Northwest Territory continue to linger in Marietta. Names such as Putnam, Howe, White, Meigs, and Devol still dominate the city's finest homes and buildings. In 1998, it was Nancy *Putnam* Hollister of Marietta who became Ohio's first female governor. From the beginning, Marietta's settlers, though deeply religious, were accepting of different faiths, industrious, and sophisticated. Marietta's early economic success came from shipbuilding. Historian Andrew Cayton has explained, "The arrival of a Marietta-built ship at a port in Italy was a testament to the vision and persistence of the city's founders."³⁹ Furthermore, Marietta and nearby Parkersburg, West Virginia had been oil and gas boomtowns in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In the beautiful cemetery where O'Neill was laid to rest, the most striking monument is a large stone tower at the top of which stands a ten-foot statue of one of these oil tycoons, leaning against an even larger statue of a gushing oil rig. Victorian mansions rivaling those anywhere in the state, and meant to evoke a sense of old money, still stand today on the finest streets in both cities. Washington County's Republican politics were more a reflection of its key role in the Abolitionist movement and its affluence than of downstate conservatism. In fact, an examination of the electoral map serves to differentiate Washington County from its geographic neighbors. Southeastern Ohio counties are famous for switching their vote in presidential races to whichever candidate offers the brightest prospects for the region's improvement, but not so for Washington County. In the fifteen presidential elections since 1948, Washington County has voted solidly Republican in every presidential race except for Lyndon Johnson's run in 1964.

³⁹ Cayton, who grew up in Marietta, is one of the only historians of Ohio to accurately portray the city's unique character. See Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 2002) 40, 57, 96-97, 351, 407.

Despite Marietta's sophistication, less than a mile across the muddy Ohio River lay the more rural regions of West Virginia, then as now one of the poorest states in the nation. One did not need to traverse the Ohio, however, in order to find immense poverty. The counties surrounding Marietta were then (also as now) some of the poorest in the state, with unemployment rates, hunger, and living conditions closer to the Depression-era South than the booming economy of postwar Ohio. Growing up in Marietta, O'Neill would have been surrounded with these extremes of poverty and wealth often thought to be more characteristic of large cities on the East Coast, rather than that of rural Southeastern Ohio.

While industrial areas could be found on the outskirts of town and on the West Virginia side of the Ohio River, Marietta was more likely to be known in O'Neill's lifetime for its banks, its private liberal arts college, and its scenic charm.⁴⁰ Long before the 1950s, Parkersburg had surpassed Marietta as the largest city for at least fifty miles in any direction. In the postwar period, the West Virginia side of the river was growing, with new chemical and plastics plants ushering in a more recession-proof postwar sector of the economy than the heavy manufacturing sector driven by steel and automobiles. The growth of Marietta and Parkersburg in the postwar period would have offered O'Neill a different perspective from a politician hailing from Akron, Youngstown, Cleveland, or Toledo. The businesses that moved into the mid-Ohio River Valley in the 1950s and 1960s were of the "new" economy: plastics, chemicals, and light manufacture. Most of these businesses were not unionized, and remain that way today. O'Neill's father was a lifetime government servant, and while the family's lifestyle was comfortable, the young politician was emphatically *not* raised on a tree-line Marietta boulevard, where the mansions of oil and gas tycoons, bankers, and wealthy landowners were located.

⁴⁰ "History: The Beginning," MariettaOhio.Info: Marietta's Hometown Website, <http://mariettaohio.info/history/beginning/index.php>.

Both in the blue-collar neighborhood of Marietta where he was raised and the Southeast Ohio farmlands that he represented in the general assembly, O'Neill likely was exposed to some of the nation's poorest citizens. While O'Neill was raised in a civilized town and had attended one of the best liberal arts universities in the state, the district he represented was extremely rural. In that way, O'Neill's background is hard to pigeonhole. So often tied to Appalachia and the South, people in the mid-Ohio Valley do not speak with heavy accents. Often viewed as nothing but rural farm country by outsiders, it is quite possible that O'Neill had never set foot on a farm by the time he enrolled at Marietta College.

In fact, it is hard to find a figure in Ohio's political history with a parallel background. The Tafts—whose ranks at that time included a former president and chief justice of the Supreme Court, as well as a recent United States Senator—were the embodiment of establishment prestige, which seemed to emanate from their majestic Sky Farm just outside of Cincinnati.⁴¹ The backgrounds of Ohio Republicans, however, were not always so comfortable. John Bricker, who served as Ohio's governor before being elected as a United States Senator in 1946, hailed from a typical Midwestern working farm in Madison County, Ohio, was educated in a one-room school, and had to work odd jobs for a year just to earn enough money to attend college.⁴² Both Michael V. DiSalle, O'Neill's opponent in 1956 and 1958, and Frank J. Lausche were the sons of first-generation immigrants, and born into working-class families in the urbanized areas of northern Ohio. DiSalle was the oldest of seven children; Lausche was the second oldest of ten children. The political and social climate in which these Roman Catholic

⁴¹ James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 7-11.

⁴² Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 51-52.

politicians were raised bore a closer resemblance to the big cities of the East than to the rest of Ohio.⁴³

Even those Ohio politicians who called Southeastern Ohio home had remarkably different upbringings than O'Neill. James A. Rhodes, who was actually raised in various small towns across southern Ohio and Indiana, grew up in a much less comfortable environment than O'Neill. Rhodes' father died when the younger Rhodes was nine, and he was raised by a single mother who ran a boarding house and worked in a cigar factory. As a young man, Rhodes worked a bevy of odd jobs to survive, and dropped out of Ohio State University to concentrate on business ventures, including his campus-area restaurant, Jim's Place.⁴⁴ Vernal G. Riffe, Jr., the folksy longest-serving Speaker in the history of the Ohio House of Representatives, had a Kentucky-border upbringing in New Boston, Ohio, in a region similar to the areas in which Rhodes was raised, but in a household not nearly as impoverished. Rhodes and Riffe, who shared a friendship and a political style despite their differing party affiliations, were products of areas that were a closer fit to the stereotypical image of "Southeastern Ohio."⁴⁵ O'Neill's world was decidedly more genteel than that.

With all his characteristics combined, O'Neill had the traits necessary to be an extremely successful postwar politician. His military service, young family, Protestantism, Irish surname, strong speaking skills, Southeastern Ohio background, fine record of government service, and political moderation were all ingredients that could elevate an ordinary energetic and intelligent young man into a political star. To be sure, there were candidates both before and after O'Neill without these characteristics who still became political heavyweights. The two Democratic

⁴³ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 52, 56.

⁴⁴ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 56-57.

⁴⁵ Randy Ludlow, "Longtime House Speaker Vern Riffe Dies," *The Cincinnati Post*, 31 July 1997, <http://www.cincypost.com/news/1997/riffe073197.html>.

governors who served as bookends for O'Neill's time as governor, Frank Lausche and Michael DiSalle, came nowhere near meeting the above list of requirements for political success. They were not World War II veterans, were noticeably older (and thus not perceived as young and energetic), were Roman Catholics, and were often more liberal, especially Michael DiSalle. It is important to remember, however, that neither Lausche nor DiSalle were considered to be young political stars like O'Neill. DiSalle served only one term as governor, and Lausche only achieved the high regard of Ohio voters after serving several terms as governor. O'Neill was just forty years old in 1956 and his characteristics made him the kind of politician (unlike Lausche or DiSalle) about whom people remarked: "he could be president some day."

II. THE REPUBLICAN PLAN FOR DOMINANCE

The victor's spoils in the 1956 race for governor would be sweeter than ever before. In the 1954 general election, Ohio voters had approved an amendment increasing the term in office for all statewide officeholders, except auditor and members of the Supreme Court, from two to four years.⁴⁶ Whoever won the 1956 governor's race could run two years later as an incumbent for Ohio's first four-year gubernatorial term. Unlike the grueling and near-constant campaigning required by the two-year gubernatorial terms before, the 1956 election offered the winner a roadmap with a clear route to control of Ohio's executive branch until 1963. The change to the four-year term, which brought with it a term limit of two successive terms for the office of governor, was largely the result of Republican frustration with Democratic Governor Frank J. Lausche's continued success at the polls. Term limits alone would have been too obvious an attack on the ever-popular Lausche, and therefore the term limits were packaged with the more popular proposal for four-year terms for statewide offices. The 100th General Assembly had large Republican majorities in both legislative bodies, with Republicans outnumbering

⁴⁶ *Legislative Digest & Review*, William E. Halley, ed., vol. II, no. 44, 5 November 1954, 1.

Democrats 102 to 34 in the House and 23 to 10 in the Senate. Such strong majorities easily allowed the Republicans to place the term-limiting constitutional amendment, which was slated to take effect in January 1959, on the ballot in the November 1954 election. As often is the case with ballot referenda, the voters sent conflicting messages in the 1954 election. While approving the term limit and four-year term amendment (which carried by 231,934 votes), the voters returned Lausche to the governor's office for a record fifth term as Ohio's governor. There was no doubt, however, that the four-year term and term limit package would favor the Republicans in the short term, given that in addition to their legislative majorities, the Republicans also controlled all of the statewide offices except for governor when the lengthened term was approved by the voters.⁴⁷

Term limits and four-year terms were just one of three measures crafted by the Ohio Republicans in the postwar period with the intent of changing the electoral landscape. In 1940, Ohio Republicans had made sure that a single "party vote" could no longer be cast in both the gubernatorial and presidential races in order to protect statewide Republican hopefuls for governor against the popularity of Franklin D. Roosevelt on the national level. A similar fear of national Democratic appeal, along with fear of Lausche's popularity created by his comeback win over Thomas J. Herbert for governor in 1948, led the Republicans in November 1949 to introduce a constitutional amendment by initiative petition that required voters to indicate their selection for each individual office, rather than by voting a full-ticket party slate. The political associates of United States Senator Robert A. Taft had also lobbied for the change to what was then called the "Massachusetts ballot," where voters selected candidates for each office, because

⁴⁷ Bob Taft, Ohio Secretary of State, "Amendment and Legislation: Proposed Constitutional Amendments, Initiated by Legislation, and Law Challenged by Referendum, Submitted to the Electors," State of Ohio, 1997, <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/results/many/isshist.pdf>; Also see Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 52-53, 62-66.

of the calculation that Taft had lost votes in 1944 to a ticket led by Democratic Governor Frank Lausche. James T. Patterson has reasoned that the new ballot had two effects: it worked to the advantage of well-known incumbents and it naturally allowed for more divided election outcomes. After Taft won reelection in 1950 on the changed ballot, it was widely recognized that the changed ballot had saved the Senator as many as 100,000 votes that would have previously been lost to straight-ticket voting.⁴⁸

In the end, however, the Republicans paradoxically paid for each of their three efforts to tilt the electoral playing field in this manner. With the final reform measure—four-year terms and term limits to prevent the longtime occupation of offices by candidates like Lausche—in place, Republican control over Ohio in 1956 simply appeared to be inevitable. After Republican success on the national and state level in the 1950s, the ban on party slate voting only served to help the political success of the famously-independent Governor Lausche. The third reform measure, the four-year term for state officeholders, was the Republicans' biggest mistake. No one in 1954 could have predicted that Chairman Bliss's Republican stable would come crashing to defeat in 1958, with C. William O'Neill stumbling the hardest. In their self-aggrandizing effort to stack the deck with longer terms, the Republicans gave the Democrats a chance to govern Ohio for twice as long. It is also important to note that the first four-year term had national political implications. Whoever controlled the governor's office in 1960 would wield tremendous influence in that year's presidential race.⁴⁹

The term limits that came as part of the new four-year term amendment package were to be no obstacle for the Republicans. Republican Chairman Ray C. Bliss had put together a slate of candidates that could be shuffled from office to office, a practice that would continue to

⁴⁸ James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican*, 461, 469-70.

⁴⁹ Alvin Silverman, "GOP Tricks Come Back to Haunt," *The Plain Dealer*, 9 November 1958, 4B.

dominate Ohio Republican politics fifty years later. The 1956 election was to be the Republicans' year in Ohio, and 1956 was to be (by no accident) also the year for Eisenhower to dominate the presidential race. Bliss had staged the players for a dramatic denouement. By election time, Republicans controlled every non-judicial statewide office except for that of governor. Lausche was the only roadblock. No matter who they threw at him, the Republicans could not defeat the independent centrist Lausche. With Lausche out, however, Bliss's stable of formidable Republican candidates could smoothly slide into full control over Ohio's affairs. The term limit and four-year term amendment was a Bliss political masterpiece only because of the reserve of successful statewide candidates he had fostered. A successful group of Republican statewide office-holders would allow an Ohio Republican Party chairman to be the conductor of an elaborate game of musical chairs. Candidate A could be auditor for eight years, while Candidate B served as attorney general. When A and B were faced with their term limit of two terms, they would simply switch places and run for the other's office, without costly primaries and divisive party infighting. For the musical chairs model to work, however, a party needed to have most (if not all) of the chairs occupied. If the Republicans won big in 1956, this process would be set in motion.

The new term limits and lengthened terms, however, did not come into effect until January 1959. It would take another round of across-the-board success—in the 1958 elections—to make the plan a working reality. Still, the importance of the 1956 elections to Bliss's overall plan was clear. Barring unforeseen events, an incumbent-heavy slate in 1958 would make accomplishing Republican political dominance in Ohio a far easier task.

There is no doubt that Bliss was crafting a strategy to make the Ohio Republicans utterly dominant in the state, regardless of what occurred on the national level. He had become the

Ohio Republican Party chairman in February 1949, just ten months before the November 1949 ballot measure ended party-slate voting. By the time the third election reform measure was enacted in 1954, Bliss's stable of candidates held every statewide office except governor. Even more important, Bliss's Republican candidates were almost all young political powers on the rise. The average age of these men in 1954, which included longtime Ohio politicians like O'Neill, James Rhodes, and Ted W. Brown, was just forty-three-years-old. Bliss himself was only forty-five in 1954. Previously, Bliss had been county chairman of the Summit County Republicans, a county which contained the industrial and heavily-unionized city of Akron, since 1941. Bliss was a successful Akron insurance broker who brought a business-like management to the Ohio Republican Party headquarters, creating separate divisions to handle legislative lobbying, public relations, and field work. His success at organizing all levels of the party relied on a laundry list of tactics.

[Bliss] launched registration drives, boosted fundraising, emphasized diversity and inclusiveness rather than ideological purity, maintained neutrality in primary contests, extensively used public-opinion surveys, began using television in campaigns, and did not concede the rank-and-file union voter to the Democrats.⁵⁰

The strategies that Bliss employed produced positive results. In 1950, Bliss helped Robert Taft win reelection to the United States Senate by the largest margin ever in an Ohio Senate contest, despite strong opposition from organized labor. Bliss took advantage of Democratic Party infighting that resulted from Lausche's independence, Lausche's refusal to effectively use patronage to reward loyal Democrats, and his hostile relationship with organized labor. What lay at the heart of Bliss's success with the Ohio Republicans was his firm belief that effective organizing and "never leaving a detail unattended" were the qualities that won

⁵⁰ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 87-88.

elections—not dogfights on the issues. Bliss, Neal Pierce has commented, was “essentially a technician to whom issues were a propaganda tool, not an end.”⁵¹

It was largely because of this focus on winning over ideology that Bliss and Rhodes would survive the Democratic onslaught in 1958 and fight another day for control of Ohio’s most powerful public offices. When Rhodes won the governor’s race in 1962, Bliss was largely credited with organizing the victory. Bliss’s polls indicated that a Goldwater run for president in 1964 would be disastrous, and he unsuccessfully tried to keep the Ohio delegation neutral at the Republican National Convention that year. When it came time to find a person to lead the Republicans after their electoral debacle in 1964, Bliss was a natural choice.⁵² When he moved on to lead the Republican National Committee in 1965 after sixteen years at the helm of the Ohio Republican Party, Bliss was credited with having built a political dynasty that would again sweep all of the races for statewide office in 1966.⁵³

III. THE RUN FOR GOVERNOR IN 1956

As O’Neill’s gubernatorial announcement in Marietta moved from his personal upbringing to the gubernatorial contest, he laid out the basic goals on which his party’s platform would be crafted later that summer. The 1956 election was a race to the center, where both parties staked claims to proposals that had a near-universal appeal with the voters. The postwar consensus policy staples of highway construction, mental health, education, and conservation of natural resources were set forth as the key issues of the 1956 campaign, and it was not easy for voters to distinguish the candidates by reading their public statements alone.

⁵¹ Neal Peirce, as quoted in Tom Diemer, “Ohio in Washington: The Congressional Delegation,” in *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994), 208.

⁵² Tom Diemer, “Ohio in Washington: The Congressional Delegation,” in *Ohio Politics*, 205-06.

⁵³ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 54, 55, 88-90, 92.

The “highway” issue was both the most prominent and most important issue of the campaign. It would be hard to exaggerate the level of concern with highway construction in the 1950s. In September 1956, the *Legislative Digest & Review* emphasized the heightened role that mental health and highway issues had in the campaign. In its customarily staccato style, the *Digest* summarized Ohio’s roadway problem: “Ohio’s casualties are appalling—city streets choked with traffic—few main highways nowadays seem to meet traffic specification of even the uninitiated layman.”⁵⁴ By 1955, Ohio was about to complete a major highway project—the 241-mile, divided four-lane Ohio Turnpike serving the northern part of the state in the east-west direction. Still, unrest was beginning to grow. “For two years,” the *Digest* told its readers, “the improvements expected by Mr. Average Motorist have not been arriving as he had anticipated.” The turnpike had been built from scratch in only three years, and that fact gave its planners and engineers the obvious advantage of playing in an undisturbed sandbox. Unlike the state Highway Department, which had an aged road system of thousands of miles to maintain, the turnpike planners were able to have a singular focus. In a state as large as Ohio, getting the Highway Department, even though its funding deficiencies had been solved, off the ground was no easy task. Noting that criticism for change at the department was mounting, the *Digest* commented that “those dreamed-of four lane freeways still seem far away.”⁵⁵ As the *Digest* suggested, problems at the Highway Department could not be blamed on a lack of funds. Indeed, the two biennial appropriations that immediately proceeded O’Neill’s administration

⁵⁴ *Legislative Digest & Review* IV, no. 36, 7 September 1956, 1; For mental health discussion, see *Legislative Digest & Review* IV, no. 37, 14 September 1956, 1.

⁵⁵ *Legislative Digest & Review* VIII, no. 29, 8 July 1955, 2.

brought highway spending increases of 42 percent and 142 percent, respectively, over previous appropriations.⁵⁶

On the highway issue, O'Neill gave aggressive speeches, but offered few details. At times, Attorney General O'Neill's statements showed the fanciful ambitions of a youthful candidate rather than a seasoned political realist. For example, O'Neill offered a proposal for the "immediate" construction of 6,200 miles of highways—to be built without raising additional revenues.⁵⁷ Giving his standard highway speech in Cincinnati on October 10, 1956, O'Neill laid out four main objectives: break the traffic bottlenecks in the cities by constructing expressways, construct the proposed federal interstate highway defense system to connect Ohio's eight largest cities, and "establish and continuously maintain a master highway program." Charging that Governor Lausche's administration parceled out highway funds to serve political goals rather than actual highway needs, O'Neill promised to furnish "links in a statewide system rather than a highway hodge podge."⁵⁸ As part of keeping his highway speech short and ambiguous, O'Neill explained that "action, not talk, is needed." Rather than entertain discussions about financing highway construction well into the future, this rising political star was more concerned with "highways for today."⁵⁹

The state's treatment of the mentally ill was the second issue that dominated the 1956 governor's race. Since the second half of Lausche's time in office, mental health had gained increased attention as Ohioans turned their attention to deplorable conditions in the state's wards.

⁵⁶ "Appropriations—Comparison Bien. Appro. & Expend. General Revenue & Hwy. Funds (Cloud) LSC, 4/6/62," State of Ohio, Ohio General Assembly—Legislative Service Commission, OHS, State Archives Series 2352, Box 5607, "Miscellaneous—Reports and Studies, 1955-1972."

⁵⁷ "Bill O'Neill for Governor" Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign," 2.

⁵⁸ "Bill O'Neill for Governor" Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign," 2.

⁵⁹ Speech by C. William O'Neill, 10 October 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Press Releases—1956 Campaign," 1.

Perhaps no other issue in the campaign can as adequately reflect Ohio's mid-1950s priorities. In probably no Ohio election since has such an issue as mental health played such a prominent role in a gubernatorial campaign. Ohio was taking advantage of the prosperity, luxury, and comfort of its postwar economic boom to turn its eye inward and attempt to improve the living conditions of all its citizens. In this rare style of gubernatorial campaign, the suffering of a small portion of the population received top-billing over issues such as job creation, education, and taxes.

Water conservation and the issue of preserved recreation space played an equally prominent role in the 1956 campaign. On this issue, O'Neill tried to walk a tightrope between environmental protection (which was very much in its infancy as a powerful cause) and economic development. After noting the importance of Ohio's industrial climate, O'Neill's speech on this issue let voters know the darker side of Ohio's economy: "Every ton of steel we manufacture requires 65,000 gallons of water to produce, every automobile 95,000 gallons, every ton of synthetic rubber 800,000 gallons." What hit Ohio doubly hard was the fact that Ohio was also an agricultural giant, in addition to an industrial giant, and water was its agricultural lifeblood. Plus, there was a recreational component. Although O'Neill himself rarely took time out for recreation, his campaign made it seem like he did, even portraying him as a cartoon fisherman in a pamphlet trumpeting his fight as attorney general against stream pollution.⁶⁰ O'Neill's solution to the water conservation problem was considerably more detailed than his answers to the highway problem. He proposed a comprehensive inventory of the statewide water supply, in order to determine future need, current usage, and sources of pollution definitively. He proposed industry location planning and reusing methods that would retain more usable water, and staffing the Water Pollution Control Board with scientists and staff members who

⁶⁰ "Meet Bill O'Neill: Republican Candidate for Governor" Pamphlet, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign."

could strictly enforce antipollution statutes. Third, he advocated (drawing on his legislative background) a complete overhaul of the state's water control laws. O'Neill's proposals on water conservation were truly visionary. The current Ohio environmental regulatory system includes the type of scientific monitoring that O'Neill envisioned. An example of O'Neill's foresight was his anticipation of the need to consolidate the state's environmental regulatory system, which was scattered throughout different departments, into something like the cabinet-level Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, which was not established as a department in Ohio until 1972.⁶¹

The theme that stood out in all of O'Neill's campaign statements was his tendency to rely on calls for technical experts to solve the problems facing Ohio. O'Neill's campaign advertisement copy portrayed the candidate as such an expert, for example, on the business of state governance, proclaiming him the "best-informed public official in the state."⁶² O'Neill's youthful exuberance and his surrounding coterie of young, highly-educated staffers probably influenced this predisposition, but it was also a product of the times. In the postwar period, Americans turned to an army of experts to help them lead their lives, and so when it came to solving Ohio's woes, experts could be expected to supply the answers. The social historian Elaine Tyler May has explained that "postwar America was the era of the expert," and that the "cult of expertise" was part of a social phenomena that was largely related to the atomic age and the Cold War.⁶³ For O'Neill, a "staff of technical assistants in fields such as engineering, public

⁶¹ "Water Conservation and Development in Ohio," Speech of C. William O'Neill, Attorney General and Candidate for Governor, O'Neill for Governor Committee, 11 October 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Press Releases—1956 Campaign," 1-5; For information on the current the Ohio EPA, see "Getting to Know Ohio EPA," Ohio EPA Website, n.d., <http://www.epa.state.oh.us/pic/facts/get2know.pdf>, 1-3.

⁶² "Bill O'Neill for Governor" Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign," 1.

⁶³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1999) 21.

health, and finance” could compile charts, graphs, lists, and white papers that would point the way out of Ohio’s problems.⁶⁴

The governor’s office in 1956 was the logical destination for O’Neill. He had already crossed two major hurdles to an Ohio gubernatorial bid: he had led the legislature and he had been elected statewide. The incumbent governor was the widely popular Democrat Frank J. Lausche, who was serving in his record-breaking fifth term. Lausche, however, had decided by late 1955 to aim for a bigger stage in the 1956 elections: the United States Senate.⁶⁵ In Ohio, where a loss in an early bid for statewide office was treated like an initiation rite, the right to challenge Lausche had become a cannon-fodder race on which young Republican candidates, like James A. Rhodes, had cut their teeth. With Lausche’s decision to run for the United States Senate, however, a Republican could actually hope to win the next governor’s race. When Lausche officially announced in 1955 his intention to oust the incumbent United States Senator George Bender from office, the path to the governor’s office for O’Neill was clear.

O’Neill was clearly the first in line under the Bliss organization of the Ohio Republican Party. Not only did he have the statewide exposure of having served as attorney general and Speaker of the House, he had never lost in eighteen straight primary and general election campaigns. O’Neill was billed as the King Midas of Ohio’s elections. Not only did every race he touch turn to a golden victory, but he also won them all by comfortable margins. As O’Neill’s campaign materials would boast during the 1956 campaign, the young man had “consistently piled up landslide majorities in the large metropolitan areas.”⁶⁶ In his first statewide race, the 1950 Republican primary for attorney general, O’Neill defeated Harry T.

⁶⁴ “Water Conservation and Development in Ohio,” Speech of C. William O’Neill, Attorney General and Candidate for Governor, O’Neill for Governor Committee, 11 October 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, “Press Releases—1956 Campaign,” 4.

⁶⁵ *Legislative Digest & Review* III, no. 52, 30 December 1955, 3-4.

⁶⁶ “Bill O’Neill for Governor” Advertising Agency Copy, 1956, CWOP, OHS, 1.

Marshall by almost fourteen percentage points. O'Neill's primary victory propelled him to the narrowest victory of his political career, a six-percentage-point defeat of the incumbent Democratic Attorney General Herbert S. Duffy. After the 1950 general election, O'Neill's electoral successes increased. Unopposed in the 1952 and 1954 Republican primaries for attorney general, O'Neill went on to victory in those general elections by margins of fifteen and twelve percentage points, respectively. In the 1954 general election, O'Neill amassed more votes than any other Republican on the ticket, and his 284,193-vote margin of victory surpassed the margin of victory for every other candidate in the election. The 1954 election had made O'Neill "the man to watch in Ohio Republicanism."⁶⁷ Out of a field that included such later Ohio political powerhouses as James A. Rhodes and Ted W. Brown, O'Neill had simply outshined his peers.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to assume that the Democrat Lausche's longevity in office was a reflection of either the liberalism of Ohio voters or their predisposition to vote for Democratic candidates. Although both Franklin Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman had enjoyed the support of Ohioans in national elections, Ohio still had a very moderate political environment. Lausche had long been considered a "lone wolf," who ran his campaigns for statewide office without the support of unions and the traditional Democratic Party structure. There was a political truism in Ohio that held "Nobody likes Lausche except the people."⁶⁸ O'Neill, who later admitted that he was an obvious admirer of Lausche, faced an unconventional situation for a candidate trying to succeed an incumbent who belonged to the other major party. Since Lausche was stepping out voluntarily, the door was opened for a race based on a continuation of Lausche's broadly popular policies, and the 1956 governor's race turned into a contest over who

⁶⁷ "Billy O'Neill Finally Takes the Long Count," *The Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1958, 28.

⁶⁸ Damon Stetson, "President Found Ahead in Ohio; Lausche Leading in Senate Race," *New York Times*, 31 October 1956, p. 1.

seemed most likely to succeed in that aim. Although Lausche surprised some observers by playing Democratic Party politics and publicly campaigning for Michael V. DiSalle to replace him in office, it was also clear from early on that an O'Neill administration would probably be more similar to Lausche's time in office. In fact, Lausche never disparaged O'Neill (or his record) during the 1956 campaign.

Perhaps the only man who could stand in O'Neill's way on the road to the top of Ohio's political system was the current lieutenant governor, John W. Brown.⁶⁹ By October 1955, leaks from both the Brown and O'Neill camps indicated that both of these two men did intend to run in the 1956 Republican gubernatorial primary, although official announcements were months away.⁷⁰ Although Brown was O'Neill's only challenger in the primary, he was not a very serious threat to O'Neill's chances. Brown's only elected office prior to his two terms as lieutenant governor had been mayor of Medina, Ohio for three years. In addition, the fact that Brown was originally from Athens County, just a short distance away from O'Neill's hometown of Marietta in Southeastern Ohio, did not provide Brown with the opportunity to capitalize on the potential O'Neill weakness of hailing from a region that supplied less than ten percent of the Ohio vote.⁷¹

Lieutenant Governor Brown proved to be no real obstacle to O'Neill. If anything, the 1956 gubernatorial primary, demonstrated that O'Neill was ready for the big time. He defeated Brown in the Republican primary by more than a half-million votes. O'Neill compiled the largest percentage-point margin of victory (forty-five points) in the field, and turned in an electoral performance which he would never match in the rest of his forty-year political career.⁷²

⁶⁹ Curtin and Bell, *Ohio Politics Almanac*, 54-55, 92.

⁷⁰ *Legislative Digest & Review* III, no. 43, 28 October 1955, 1, 4.

⁷¹ Curtin and Bell, *Ohio Politics Almanac*, 54-55, 95.

⁷² Ohio Secretary of State, *Historical Election Data*, <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/results/index.html>.

In the end, Brown carried only two small, Southeastern Ohio counties (Jackson and Vinton) in the primary campaign against O'Neill.⁷³

In 1956, the O'Neill camp showed the state how to conduct a modern political campaign in Ohio. O'Neill's campaign set up shop for the general election in the Deshler-Hilton Hotel, which with over 1,000 rooms was by far the largest in Columbus. The Deshler-Hilton was also strategically located at the corner of Broad and High Streets, overlooking the Ohio Statehouse.⁷⁴ From the first of August to the end of November, the campaign racked up \$1,095 in hotel room bills (\$7,677 in 2005 dollars).⁷⁵ By the end of primary season in May 1956, the O'Neill campaign had hand-addressed 28,000 thank-you notes to petition circulators, sent out 80 letters to Ohio mayors, 5,500 letters to township trustees, 120,644 letters to voters in 40 counties, prepared television coverage for all major Ohio cities, distributed 40,000 endorsement cards, and mailed 386,000 pieces of literature to voters.⁷⁶ As if this public relations operation was not enough, the O'Neill campaign also collected information on the Brown campaign. George C. Smith, later appointed to the Federal District Court in Columbus by President Ronald Reagan, had the dubious task of secretly monitoring the Brown for Governor Headquarters (also located in the Deshler-Hilton) and communicating his findings back to Kenneth Krouse at the O'Neill campaign. Smith, who apparently had some kind of position with the Brown campaign, reported on the Brown campaign's mailings and campaign events, provided a detailed inventory of the

⁷³ Official Report of the Secretary of State Ted W. Brown of Primary Election Results, 8 May 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Election Statistics."

⁷⁴ "The 1958 Col-Met Handbook," Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce, Research and Business Statistics Department, 21, in CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 38, "Chamber of Commerce (Columbus)."

⁷⁵ Deshler-Hilton Hotel Receipts, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Gwynne B. Myers—Personal: 1956 Campaign."

⁷⁶ "Memo on Major Projects," O'Neill Campaign for Governor, 4 May 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Letters of Endorsement," 1.

office equipment in the Brown headquarters, and even reported on open mail found on the Lieutenant Governor's campaign headquarters desk.⁷⁷

O'Neill had also previously demonstrated fine skill as a political maneuverer. Early on as attorney general, O'Neill had used his clout to stack the election for president of the Ohio League of Young Republican Clubs, thereby ensuring selection of his assistant in the attorney general's office (and later assistant in the governor's office), Alvin I. Krenzler, as president.⁷⁸ O'Neill's actions in the Attorney General's office demonstrated the emphasis he placed on hiring young, smart aides. In addition to establishing Krenzler in an important supporting political role, O'Neill increased the size of his staff by ten percent in his first seven months as attorney general. At the same time, the average age of O'Neill's staff attorneys shrank to the age of thirty-two. Rumors began to emerge from the attorney general's office that O'Neill was "building a formidable machine built on patronage in his office."⁷⁹

In the general election, Ohioans were introduced to television as a campaign medium for statewide offices, with O'Neill spending \$59,952 on television advertising in the 1956 campaign (\$420,325 in 2005 dollars). Democrat Michael V. DiSalle, O'Neill's opponent in the general election, only spent \$18,281 on television advertisements in 1956 (\$128,169 in 2005 dollars).⁸⁰ Five-minute television programs (scheduled to run 104 times statewide in the last month of the campaign) touched on the campaign's four main campaign themes: highways, mental health, education, and conservation and recreation.⁸¹ Remarkably, given that the use of television was relatively new for Ohio political campaigns, the O'Neill camp planned at the outset to devote the

⁷⁷ Memo to Ken Krouse from George C. Smith, n.d., CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Gubernatorial Campaign of 1956," 1.

⁷⁸ William E. Halley, *State Government Report XXVIII*, 29 June 1951, p. 1. The *State Government Report* is the predecessor to Halley's longstanding *Legislative Digest & Review*.

⁷⁹ Halley, *State Government Report XXXIV*, 10 August 1951, 2-3.

⁸⁰ Curtin and Bell, *Ohio Politics Almanac*, 55.

⁸¹ "O'Neill for Governor Campaign Five-Minute Television Program Schedule," n.d., CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on the 1956 Campaign."

bulk of their financial resources towards television. The campaign's preliminary budget provided for \$60,000 for television, \$12,000 for billboards, \$5,000 for radio, \$7,500 for print advertising, and \$8,000 for campaign literature expenses. These media expenses were but a small part of the \$190,850 that O'Neill planned to spend on the campaign.⁸² As it turned out, O'Neill did devote the bulk of his resources to television, in the course of spending \$235,847 to finance his 1956 campaign (\$1.65 million in 2005 dollars). DiSalle, who was never favored to win the race, spent just \$82,179 (\$576,159 in 2005 dollars).⁸³

O'Neill's traditional campaign materials were equally professional. His pamphlets, bumper stickers, placards, and posters were slick and persuasive. The candidate's electoral success, notable service as attorney general, success in fighting narcotics trafficking, and military service were highlighted. Rather than compensate for O'Neill's youth by attempting to portray him in campaign materials as older, the O'Neill campaign used the strategy of portraying "Bill" as a hyperactive youngster who had simply done *everything*. The headline of one brochure even flouted O'Neill's age: "At 40 O'Neill is Serving His 18th Year in Ohio's Government."⁸⁴ In addition, O'Neill could count on the support of almost all of the state's important newspapers. O'Neill's meritorious service had gained compliments along the way from such large papers as the *Cleveland Press* (Ohio's largest daily at this time), the *Canton Repository*, the *Youngstown Vindicator*, the *Cincinnati Post*, the *Cleveland News*, the *Plain Dealer*, and the *Columbus Citizen*.⁸⁵

⁸² "Maximum Basic Budget," 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Letters of Endorsement," 1.

⁸³ Mike Curtin, "The O'Neill-DiSalle Years, 1957-1963," in *Ohio Politics*, Alexander P. Lamis and Mary Anne Sharkey, eds. (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994), 46.

⁸⁴ *Meet Bill O'Neill: Republican Candidate for Governor* Pamphlet, n.d., CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on 1956 Campaign."

⁸⁵ *Meet Bill O'Neill* Pamphlet, CWOP, OHS.

The final stretch of the campaign included a multi-city October tour of Ohio by Vice President Richard M. Nixon and his wife Pat. Ray C. Bliss, the consummate organizer and detail-oriented state party chairman, organized the Nixon visit down to the smallest details, including arranging multiple motorcades and short flights between each of the cities visited by the Nixons.⁸⁶

A Republican political tidal wave engulfed Ohio and the rest of the nation in the fall of 1956. In late October, the *New York Times* assessed the Republicans' chances in the 1956 Ohio general election. After conceding that Eisenhower continued to enjoy the strong support of Ohioans, the *Times*' Damon Stetson explained: "But no one seems to expect [Eisenhower's] margin to approach that of four years ago, when he won by 500,000 votes of 3,700,000 cast in the state."⁸⁷ As it turned out, Eisenhower carried Ohio on November 6 by over 820,000 votes out of 3,761,322 votes cast. The state party chairman Bliss was largely credited with Eisenhower's strong showing in Ohio, a stronger performance than the president enjoyed nationally.⁸⁸ The Ohio Republicans carried every partisan, statewide office on the ballot, and managed to lose only one major office to the Democrats. The lone-wolf Lausche had won his race for United States Senate, but that was but a small price for Bliss and the Ohio Republicans to pay. After all, Lausche had been the only Ohio Democrat who found any kind of statewide success in the 1956 general election.

It is important to emphasize that the tone of the 1956 campaign, and the fact that both O'Neill and DiSalle called for such broad-sweeping social programs, should not be taken as evidence that the two favored large tax increases, or what would later be called "big

⁸⁶ "Vice President and Mrs. Richard M. Nixon: Detailed Ohio Schedule," 14 October 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Literature on the 1956 Campaign."

⁸⁷ Damon Stetson, "President Found Ahead in Ohio; Lausche Leading in Senate Race," *New York Times*, 31 October 1956, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 89.

government.” On the contrary, both politicians seem to have believed that the rapidly expanding Ohio economy would generate more than enough revenues to cover these programs.⁸⁹ Only in this era in Ohio could a politician meet the straight-face test when calling for an increased role for government programs while simultaneously lambasting the evils of higher taxation. The residual influence of Democratic Governor Frank Lausche was clear. After all, O’Neill’s first inauguration as attorney general coincided with the first of three consecutive Lausche inaugurals. The thrifty Lausche had consistently held the favor of Ohio’s voters because he had “built a reputation for being tightfisted with the public purse.”⁹⁰

It is impossible to understand O’Neill’s subsequent career and the political fault lines on Ohio’s horizon without giving full notice to the way Ohio’s economy was perceived by its political leaders in 1956. In December 1956, even the cautionary Ohio political observer William E. Halley had to admit that “the government of Ohio has been, for all practical purposes, on a very sound basis for many years.”⁹¹ The fact that Ohio’s ever-expanding economy had consistently brought in higher revenues meant that tough budgetary decisions had been avoided. Every year since the end of World War II, the state’s spending had marched upward, and the state’s citizens had come to expect increasing state services, and to have them provided at an increasingly sophisticated level. Indeed, in a relatively low-inflation time, Ohio’s spending increases seemed to know no limit throughout the 1950s. The state’s 1955-1957 appropriations to the general revenue fund and to highway construction and maintenance were \$266.5 million

⁸⁹ For DiSalle’s view see, Richard G. Zimmerman, *Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael V. DiSalle* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 2003), 104; For O’Neill’s view, see *Legislative Digest & Review*, William E. Halley, ed., vol. V, no. 8, 1 March 1957, 1.

⁹⁰ Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 53.

⁹¹ *Legislative Digest & Review*, William E. Halley, ed., vol. IV, no. 52, 28 December 1956, 1.

higher the previous biennium in 1953-1955, and the 1957-1959 appropriations came in over a billion dollars higher than the previous biennium's appropriations.⁹²

Ohio's postwar economic success was an intoxicant of which the state's politicians could never get enough. The facts did seem to foreshadow great things in Ohio's economic future. The state's population grew by over twenty-two percent in the 1950s, outstripping the strong national population growth rate of nineteen percent.⁹³ O'Neill reminded voters during the 1956 campaign that industrial development had produced "a six billion dollar investment in Ohio in the past ten years."⁹⁴ In one of his longest stock speeches of the 1956 campaign, O'Neill laid out a brief roadmap to the economic promised land. The soon-to-be governor explained that "*experts* are virtually unanimous in estimating that," Ohio could move to first from second place on the ranking of largest industrial states by 1965, grow its population in only a decade to eleven million people, add three-fourths of a million workers, nearly double workers' incomes, and generally enjoy Ohio's "greatest economic expansion."⁹⁵ In his Valentine's Day announcement in Marietta, O'Neill had boiled Ohio's economic outlook down to a simple message: "New jobs, new opportunities, greater prosperity are all in sight. This whole rosy future, in competition with other states, depends upon the climate of government Ohio maintains." In O'Neill's view, if

⁹² "Appropriations—Comparison Bien. Appro. & Expend. General Revenue & Hwy. Funds (Cloud) LSC, 4/6/62," State of Ohio, Ohio General Assembly—Legislative Service Commission, OHS, State Archives Series 2352, Box 5607, "Miscellaneous—Reports and Studies, 1955-1972."

⁹³ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, U.S. Census Bureau, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), A-1.

⁹⁴ "Water Conservation and Development in Ohio," Speech of C. William O'Neill, Attorney General and Candidate for Governor, O'Neill for Governor Committee, 11 October 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Press Releases—1956 Campaign," 1.

⁹⁵ Emphasis added. "Conservation Speech," C. William O'Neill, n.d. [1956], CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, "Gubernatorial Campaign of 1956—Conservation—Resources," 1.

Ohio could keep from being a divisive political and economic battleground, then business would flourish and Ohio would continue to grow by leaps and bounds.⁹⁶

If in hindsight these declarations sound fanciful, it is important to remember that they were made in Ohio with the utmost sincerity, and that the man uttering them went on to win that fall's race for governor by over 400,000 votes. Ohio *did* seem to be poised on the brink of unprecedented economic expansion, which was thought to be the natural consequence of steadily increasing postwar growth. It would take a recession that hit Ohio particularly hard, and a devastating election outcome for the Republicans in power, to bring the lofty expectations of Ohio's postwar leaders down from the clouds.

IV. THE O'NEILL ADMINISTRATION

An interesting hitch occurred on C. William O'Neill's way to the governor's office. Remarkably, no one had really considered the fact that because United States Senate terms started on an earlier date United States Senator-elect Frank J. Lausche would be required to resign as Ohio's governor eleven days before the next Ohio governor took over.⁹⁷ The oddity in such a situation was that Ohio then held separate elections for governor and lieutenant governor, and the Democrat Lausche's lieutenant governor was none other than Republican John W. Brown, O'Neill's opponent in the 1956 gubernatorial primary. If the issue of the eleven-day lack of a governor was considered, no one seems to have considered the possibility—certainly not O'Neill—that Brown would take his eleven-day administrative duties seriously. To the surprise of many, the contentious Brown moved into the governor's mansion and office, convened a meeting of Lausche's cabinet, and even removed the portraits of Democratic statesmen that

⁹⁶ "Remarks of C. William O'Neill for Release," 14 February 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Governor's Correspondence, 1956-1958, Illness Letters and Press Releases," 5.

⁹⁷ The eleven-day gubernatorial administration has only occurred twice in Ohio's history (in 1956 and 1998-1999). On December 31, 1998, Lieutenant Governor Nancy P. Hollister of Marietta became Ohio's first female governor when Governor George V. Voinovich resigned in order to be sworn in as a United States Senator.

adorned Lausche's walls. It is easy to imagine the chilly reception that the recalcitrant Brown's actions received by his fellow Republicans. Not only had he batted out of order in challenging O'Neill in the 1956 primary, he also threatened to upset the O'Neill transition by playing governor for less than two weeks. Instead of accepting his defeat to O'Neill in the May 1956 primary graciously, Brown now seemed to be exacting vengeance on his fellow party members for their failure to support his candidacy. O'Neill had planned to follow the Democratic Lausche in office, and make that part of his clean-slate message. Instead of O'Neill being the first Republican governor in seven years, it would be Brown. To make matters worse, Brown proceeded to take real action as governor. He commuted the sentences of five convicted murders, two of whom had been connected with the murder of a Cleveland police officer. Brown's official actions during his eleven-day administration were strange for a Republican, and that prompted the Democratic mayor of Cleveland, Anthony J. Celebrezze, Sr., to announce that Brown had committed "an inexcusable error."⁹⁸

Despite the minor frustration of the Brown interlude, surely nothing could temper O'Neill's enthusiasm. The young man from Marietta was about to move to the top of Ohio politics, and to top it all off he was doing so a month to the day before his forty-second birthday—a remarkable sign of a rapid political rise in an era that had been until this point heavily dominated by older men. On January 14, 1957, O'Neill was sworn in as governor amidst clear skies and fifteen-degree temperatures. An estimated 5,000 people turned out to witness the inauguration of the first full-term Republican governor of Ohio in eight years. In the interest of his shivering listeners, O'Neill kept his inaugural message short, and promised to provide the legislature with a more detailed program in the days ahead. The new governor pledged a

⁹⁸ Brian Usher, "The Lausche Era, 1945-1957," in *Ohio Politics*, 38-39; Curtin and Bell, *The Ohio Politics Almanac*, 54-55.

“positive rather than a negative administration,” and to keep Ohio “financially sound,” while still maintaining a low tax burden. In spite of the subfreezing temperatures, it was a glorious day for Ray Bliss and the Ohio Republicans. Paul M. Herbert was sworn in as lieutenant governor, Ted W. Brown as secretary of state, James A. Rhodes as auditor, Roger W. Tracy as treasurer, and William Saxbe as attorney general. As the *New York Times* reported the next day, the Republicans now had “complete control of the state administrative offices for the first time since 1931,” as well as control over both houses of the state legislature.⁹⁹

O’Neill had seemingly come into office with one legislative victory already to his credit. Feeling that public sector salaries could in no way compete with the private sector, O’Neill asked the General Assembly to approve raises for key cabinet officials. For the two important campaign areas of increased highway construction and care for the mentally ill, the respective directors of those departments were slated to receive staggering pay hikes of 150 and 108 percent, respectively.¹⁰⁰ Amazingly, before promising the legislature that if they raised top administration salaries he would “bring some leading business and professional men into important governmental jobs,” O’Neill had never thought to ask those same business and professional men if they would accept. The General Assembly enacted O’Neill’s requested raises, O’Neill offered positions to the best talent, and they promptly rejected the offers. O’Neill later reported that most men he tried to recruit were unwilling to give up private sector perks for the uncertainties of a state political position. O’Neill had never imagined that his way of attracting extremely young talent in the attorney general’s office, which he always viewed as essential to his own political success, would not work when trying to recruit older, more

⁹⁹ “O’Neill is Sworn as Ohio Governor,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1957, 21; Also, see “G. O. P. Governor to Begin in Ohio,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1957, 68.

¹⁰⁰ The Highway Director’s salary was set to increase from \$12,000 to \$30,000; the Director’s salary for Mental Hygiene and Correction was set to change from \$12,000 to \$25,000. See, “G. O. P. Governor to Begin in Ohio,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1957, 68.

established people. Without the staff he wanted, the O'Neill administration became bogged down. Eventually, O'Neill went back to the General Assembly to concede defeat and asked that the cabinet-level salaries be returned to their former level.

Thus, O'Neill's early victory, where the old Speaker of House turned governor was able to easily command the cooperation of the General Assembly, had actually turned out to be a blunder. Asking for cabinet raises and then asking for the General Assembly to rescind them was a minor issue, but it provided the first chance for the press to turn their criticism towards the new governor's indecision. Much later in his administration, O'Neill was still rationalizing his mistake. The federal government, O'Neill explained to a reporter, "can attract these top businessmen, but it seems that we can't."¹⁰¹ At the time, state government service, especially in a two-year gubernatorial administration, was simply not worth the hassle for established businessmen. One wonders, however, whether the "salary issue" was really a concern to ordinary voters. What really caught people's attention was that such a minor issue became such a problem. The man who preached "action" throughout his campaign for governor was demonstrating a predisposition for lengthy explanations and excuses. If voters thought about the issue at all, it was probably to wonder how Frank Lausche's administration got along so well for five terms with the old cabinet-level salaries in tact. Instead of moving past the issue (or just leaving the increased salaries in place), the personnel-obsessed O'Neill appeared stuck in neutral.

O'Neill's gubernatorial administration was also increasingly marked by strife with labor over unemployment, and specifically the Ohio's distribution of Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUBs). In 1955, organized labor had half-heartedly attempted to pass a voter initiative referendum to increase unemployment benefits. The SUBs measure, which was effectively

¹⁰¹ Godfrey Sperling, Jr., "Under Shadow of Lausche: Brief Stint Tests Ohio Governor," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 14 November 1957, 7.

opposed by the Ohio Information Committee (OIC) under the leadership of Columbus attorney and ardent conservative activist Fred J. Milligan, had failed by over 600,000 votes on the November 1955 ballot, and since the defeat labor had tried to convince the state to increase the assistance to the long-term unemployed. O'Neill, who was responding to political pressure by guarding Ohio's purse with a Lausche-like passion, refused to give in to labor's demands in this area.¹⁰² As labor became increasingly annoyed by O'Neill's hesitance to act, the labor unions began to drag O'Neill's name through the mud. On March 28, 1958, the Ohio CIO Council went on the offensive: "Governor C. William O'Neill alone is responsible for the fact that thousands of unemployed workers are not receiving supplemental unemployment benefits and he should not try to shift the blame to someone else."¹⁰³ This latest attack from labor was only a hint at what was about to come.

V. AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS

On January 22, 1958, O'Neill's life and his young administration underwent an abrupt change. On that afternoon, Governor O'Neill headed southwest of the state capital to speak to an assembled group of Jaycees in Dayton. By the time O'Neill returned to Columbus that evening, it was clear that the forty-two year old—just twelve months into his first term as governor—had suffered a heart attack. Remarkably, O'Neill's illness actually occurred on his way to Dayton, but the resolute campaigner would not cancel his engagement. O'Neill later apologized in a letter to one of the Jaycees for not "being a very good dinner companion" that evening, given that he was "not feeling good at all" during the event.¹⁰⁴ Despite the continued insistence on the part of O'Neill staffers that his "coronary convalescence" had been "mild," no one was taking

¹⁰² David L. Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York: Oxford University, 1996) 180-82.

¹⁰³ Ohio CIO Council News Release, 28 March 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 47, Folder 13, "SUB, 1957-1958," 1.

¹⁰⁴ CWO to James T. Flynn, Sr., 11 February 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness," 1.

any chances. A hospital bed was immediately installed in the new governor's mansion in Bexley, unofficial visitors were prohibited, and O'Neill's doctors ordered him to bed rest. By mid-February, O'Neill was still confined to bed. O'Neill did not leave the governor's residence until nearly a month later on February 20, and by March, O'Neill still spent the majority of his time in the governor's residence, while his assistants managed the governor's office by traveling back and forth between the mansion and the Statehouse.¹⁰⁵ O'Neill was ordered by his doctors to take a "recuperative vacation," and on March 5, O'Neill headed south with his family for two weeks of rest and relaxation at the Gulfstream Apartments in Miami Beach, Florida.¹⁰⁶

O'Neill's heart attack came just ten days before Ohio's filing deadline for the Republican primary election for governor, and speculation abounded immediately as to O'Neill's place in the race. Much like the question of whether President Eisenhower would run for president in 1956 after his 1955 heart attack, Republicans in Ohio wondered whether O'Neill would be able to recover for a general election just nine months away.¹⁰⁷ While O'Neill originally expected to run unopposed in the 1958 Republican gubernatorial primary—as Chairman Bliss's plan for the party's success required—Cincinnati city councilman Charles P. Taft announced after O'Neill's heart attack that he would enter the race as a self-styled "standby" candidate.

Taft, the younger brother of the late Senator Robert A. Taft, was far more liberal than his conservative and far more famous older brother. While ostensibly running as a back-up, there was no doubt in Republican circles that Taft was actually running to further his own interest in a more liberal version of Ohio Republicanism. Taft's announcement stirred resentment among

¹⁰⁵ CWO to E. D. Mason, Special FBI Agent in Charge—Cincinnati, 20 February 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 41, "Personal Correspondence, Ma-Me, 1957-1959"; Also, see CWO to Gordon K. Bush, 10 February 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

¹⁰⁶ CWO to Michael Maloney of *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 4 March 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 41, "Personal Correspondence, Ma, 1957-1959"; Also, see Bert Christopher of Tampa to CWO, 8 March 1950, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 38, "General Corr., Ca-Ch, 1957, 1958."

¹⁰⁷ President Eisenhower wrote to O'Neill on 28 January 1958: "I was distressed to learn this morning that you have managed to follow my exceedingly bad example." See CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

Ohio's conservative Republicans. So, too, did Taft's decision to run out of the established order that Bliss had created for Republican candidates seeking statewide office. Those who corresponded with the sicken governor had much to say about the Taft candidacy. David Ferguson, who served in the Ohio Senate, tried to shortchange Taft's appeal: "Don't worry about Taft—you can't sell him to Ohio Republicans—Ohio people don't like New Dealers."¹⁰⁸ Robert F. Black, Chairman of The White Motor Company in Cleveland, expressed a similar sentiment: "All your friends here are with you all the way and are very resentful of other people trying to take advantage of what is a temporary situation."¹⁰⁹

Yet, a bit of uncertainty was present under the surface in the correspondence O'Neill received after his heart attack. Despite all the reassurances that all would be well with both his health and with his political situation, it was almost as if O'Neill's friends were trying *too* hard to put forth an optimistic front. Ohio, by all accounts, was facing serious problems, and before his illness, many had begun to question whether O'Neill was up to the task of solving them. Many of O'Neill's closest friends, in fact, appeared to wonder whether the political challenges O'Neill faced, combined with the governor's inability to pace himself, had brought on his sudden illness. Gordon K. Bush, publisher of the *Athens Messenger* and an old O'Neill friend, scolded the young governor: "Apparently, you don't have to pass the age of 50 to over do. Remember, I spoke to you once before about that!" As a testament to the tremendous hurdles O'Neill faced after his recovery, Bush appended to his letter a recent *Messenger* editorial that adopted the same optimistic spin on O'Neill's troubles. After explaining that Ohio was fifteen years behind its neighbor states in highway construction, the editorial proclaimed that the "O'Neill administration is trying valiantly to get Ohio out of the gearshift condition of the state's main highways." No

¹⁰⁸ David Ferguson to CWO, 4 March 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

¹⁰⁹ Robert F. Black to CWO, 5 February 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

one voiced the thought that it would be nearly impossible for O'Neill to recovery properly and try to meet his lofty 1956 campaign promises. David Ferguson also worried about O'Neill's work habits: "You just overdid it taking care of the office by day, and going all hours of the night. I often wondered how you stood it."¹¹⁰

A command to "slow down" was the refrain running throughout all of the letters that O'Neill received from well-wishers. The *Akron Beacon Journal* took this message public in an editorial that underhandedly suggested that O'Neill might be too active in his campaign duties: "If the necessity to restrict his activities somewhat causes the Governor to quit dashing hither and yon across the state to every chicken pie supper, the attack may have been a blessing both to himself and to the state government. Take care of yourself, Bill."¹¹¹ David Crooks, who directed public relations for the Kroger Company, was very blunt in telling O'Neill that "my contacts with you in recent months have convinced me that you have been expending yourself too freely." O'Neill himself seemed to understand that he drove himself too hard at times. The governor explained to one friend: "I have thoroughly enjoyed the first opportunity I have taken for a rest in many, many years."¹¹²

The timing of O'Neill's illness could not have been worse. His administration had barely gotten its feet moving, and now its leader was out of commission. Little to no action had been taken regarding the four main issues of the 1956 campaign: highways, education, mental health, and water conservation. For a man who spent most of the 1956 campaign proclaiming that what

¹¹⁰ Gordon K. Bush to CWO, and attached *Athens Messenger* clipping (27 January 1958, p.4), 10 February 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness"; David Ferguson to CWO, 4 March 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

¹¹¹ *Akron Beacon Journal* editorial clipping,

¹¹² David H. Crooks to CWO, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness"; CWO to J. A. Meckstroth, 4 March 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Illness."

Ohio needed was “action,” there had been mostly protracted talk and second-guessing.¹¹³ Now, there would be no action until the chief executive recovered. To be fair, the last two-year gubernatorial term did not give O’Neill much time. O’Neill most assuredly could not help but wish that his was the first four-year, and not the last two-year gubernatorial term.

O’Neill had not been sworn in until the middle of January 1957, just over a year before his illness, and even sympathetic observers agreed that the O’Neill administration had gotten off to a remarkably slow start. After the appointments mishap (which included a flap over his highway director), the slow development of a budget, and all of the bickering over SUBs, O’Neill’s administration was behind schedule when it came to the issues about which Ohioans cared the most. Mostly, O’Neill’s slow start was the result of circumstance. The Ohio General Assembly did not meet as a full-time, professional legislature in the 1950s as it does today, and therefore the only regular session of the legislature during O’Neill’s time as governor had come and went by November 1957, when O’Neill was “beginning to run for reelection” again. The Ohio legislature would not meet again until early 1959. In addition, O’Neill felt the difficulty of living under the large political shadow cast by Frank Lausche’s successful five terms in office before becoming a United States Senator. Not only was O’Neill an obvious admirer of Lausche, but O’Neill, like Lausche, had his own ambitions for higher office. Mostly, Lausche was successful with the managing the press, a skill that O’Neill had not effectively honed in the less-noticed offices of attorney general and Speaker of the Ohio House. O’Neill did not seem to understand that pleasing the voters did not necessarily translate into pleasing the press, or that

¹¹³ See, for example, CWO, Republican State Convention Evening Address, 13 September 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 31, “State Convention,” 1.

members of the media might not be so impressed with his youthful, intelligent, and energetic assistants.¹¹⁴

Nineteen-fifty-seven was really the only solid year of O'Neill's administration that was not consumed with his illness or campaigning. Thus, the administration's 1957 year-end report, which was distributed less than a month before the governor fell ill, is an important reflection on the O'Neill record. The report was mostly filled with information on "studies," news of "progress," and promises for future improvements. Regarding post-secondary education, for example, O'Neill reported that a "plan is almost completed and will be presented in the spring of 1958 to the people of Ohio." Throughout the 1957 annual report, O'Neill repeatedly reminded voters that as governor he had resisted the urge to hike spending and taxes. The report explained that O'Neill had slashed legislative budget requests by \$100 million in order to balance the budget and maintain his pledge of no new taxes.¹¹⁵ It was clear that O'Neill was performing a rhetorical balancing act by attempting to convince voters that he had kept his 1956 campaign promises for expanded social programs, while still stressing Lausche-style tightfisted controls on state spending.

To make matters worse for O'Neill's *political* recovery, O'Neill's illness coincided with a recession that was hitting Ohio and the rest of the industrial Midwest especially hard in early 1958. The economic downturn which had begun in the fall of 1957 had turned into the single greatest economic setback since the Great Depression. Higher inflation and unemployment and decreased capital outlays were the first clear indicators of the onset of economic trouble. A United States deficit in its balance of payments emerged on the top of other poor economic

¹¹⁴ Godfrey Sperling, Jr., "Under Shadow of Lausche: Brief Stint Tests Ohio Governor," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 14 November 1957, 7.

¹¹⁵ CWO, "Year End Report," December 1957, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Press Releases, 1956-1958," 2-3, 5.

indicators in 1958.¹¹⁶ The *Business Week* index, which measured stock, bond, and commodity prices in addition to production and trade statistics, shows that the United States economy reached a high point in January 1957, just as O'Neill was inaugurated, and then began a steady slide downward. After bottoming out in mid-May 1958, the index improved throughout the summer, with brief slides backwards in July, August, and September. Still, improvement was far slower in a heavy industrial state like Ohio, where unemployment was higher than in other areas, and by the fall 1958 election the economy had yet to recover to where it stood on the day O'Neill took office.¹¹⁷

VI. TROUBLE BREWING

Just before the recession hit its low point in 1958 and O'Neill's heart attack occurred, a potentially explosive political issue had been introduced in Ohio. In the fall of 1957, certain business leaders and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce (OCC) began testing the waters for a "Right-to-Work" (RTW) drive in Ohio. Emboldened by the success that year of a RTW measure in neighboring Indiana, and by organized labor's weakness in Ohio during the SUBs fight, Ohio's business community thought the time was ripe to reduce labor's power. Since the darkest days of the Great Depression and the rebuilding period of the New Deal that followed, American labor had improved its lot in relationship to management in America. Organized labor had taken advantage of the economic success of the postwar period to exact steadily increasing demands from businesses. By the late-1950s, however, cracks were beginning to appear in the system. For some business types, the impetus behind RTW drives was extreme conservatism. RTW provided a platform on which to grumble about the state of the country and an issue for which businessmen could fight passionately. For others, RTW was a way to check the increasing

¹¹⁶ Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg*, 154-56.

¹¹⁷ "Figures of the Week," *Business Week*, 10 January 1959, 2.

political and social power of labor unions, whose status had grown steadily in stature since the New Deal. For other, more sophisticated businessmen, such as those from large *Fortune 500* corporations, RTW drives were a way to pressure unions in to confronting the reality that the American industrial economy was beginning to face in a changing world. For this last group of RTW proponents, RTW measures were a way to save the American economy, by (theoretically) placing limits on the unsustainable demands placed on the economy by rampant industrial unionism.¹¹⁸ A state like Ohio provided a wonderful laboratory in which to put these differing theories to a political test. There was also an added bonus, given Ohio's status as a major Great Lakes industrial state. RTW proponents from the beginning wanted to add heavily-industrialized states in the Midwest to the RTW column, and winning a RTW drive in the state of Michigan was the ultimate goal. If RTW could succeed in Ohio, then Michigan—home to Walter Reuther, who was public enemy number one for most business groups—would be next.¹¹⁹

The roots of RTW go back to the summer of 1947, when Republicans in Congress had passed the Taft-Hartley Act (which was chiefly authored by Ohio's own Senator Robert A. Taft) over President Harry S. Truman's veto. The Taft-Hartley legislation included a provision, section 14(b), stating that "the laws and constitutional provisions of any state that restrict the right of employers to require employees to become or remain members of labor organizations are valid." Thus, if a state legislature chose to pass a "right to work" law, it now had the express power to do so. As one contemporary newspaper account explained, RTW measures made it "unlawful to deprive a person of work solely because of his refusal to join a union." Under RTW provisions, unions and an employer were prohibited from entering into any contract that

¹¹⁸ See Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001) 3-16; Sanford M. Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1999) 236-66; and Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg*, 154-232.

¹¹⁹ Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 100-101.

mandated compulsory union membership as a condition of employment.¹²⁰ While not all union contracts had compulsory membership clauses, the big industrial union contracts usually did. In the large unions, like the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Steelworkers of America (USA), the idea of outlawing compulsory union membership as a condition of employment was disturbing. Unions would find it far more difficult to recruit and keep members if a union membership (and more importantly, payment of union dues) became optional. Hypothetical scenarios where union members would quit the union en masse were the fantasy of RTW's most conservative backers and a nightmare for RTW's opponents. In Ohio, eighty-two percent of labor union contracts had union security provisions, and repeal of those provisions would have affected approximately 920,000 Ohio workers.¹²¹ The effect of section 14(b) was to shift RTW fights from the nation's capital, where members of Congress preferred to avoid the matter, and into the statehouses and state election battles across the country. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) initially sought to challenge section 14(b) in the federal courts as an unconstitutional restriction of the right to free assembly. That legal battle ended up at the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in *Lincoln Federal Labor Union v. Northwestern Iron and Metal Company* (1949) that state RTW laws were valid "exercises of state police powers." With that loss, the fight over RTW would no longer be one waged in the federal legislature or courts, but instead in the state political arenas.¹²²

By the mid-1950s, RTW measures had grown ever more popular at the state level. Fred Hartley, Jr., Taft's coauthor on the Taft-Hartley measure and a former Republican congressman from New Jersey, led the National "Right-to-Work" Committee (NRTWC) in Washington,

¹²⁰ "Right-to-Work Laws Now a Major Issue for Labor," *New York Times*, 8 April 1956, E7.

¹²¹ *Fact Book for Speakers Against Issue 2: The Trick-Titled 'Right-to-Work' Proposal*, UOLO, 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 47, Folder 21, "RTW, General Info, 1957-1958, 1965, 1967," 10.

¹²² Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 41-47.

which had been founded by concerned businessmen in 1955. In early 1956, the NRTWC announced that it was getting involved in fifteen state-level RTW battles that year, hoping to add more states to the list of those that had already adopted RTW provisions by this point.¹²³ The RTW issue had also become a divisive one for Republicans. President Eisenhower's Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell, was strongly opposed to RTW measures, and made his opposition public throughout the 1950s. In 1956, Mitchell tried unsuccessfully to get a plank favoring repeal of state RTW laws added to the Republican national platform.¹²⁴ Eisenhower himself was non-committal on the issue. When asked at a press conference in 1957 if he would support federal RTW legislation, Eisenhower explained that he could not answer without seeing a specific bill, and that the federal stance on the issue had been merely to say to the states: "Please, Mr. State, look at this thing very carefully, and let's don't get a confused thing operating within your state.' That is as far as we have had to go."¹²⁵ Those RTW proponents who dug through Eisenhower's ambiguous language looking for a ringing endorsement of RTW would look in vain.

By the time of the decision to place RTW on the Ohio ballot in 1958, RTW had been enacted in eighteen states, but none of them resembled Ohio's economic and political climate (see Figure 1). *Business Week* noted that "of the 18 states that now have right-to-work laws, only one—Indiana—is an important industrial state."¹²⁶ Furthermore, it was far from clear that big business groups and large corporations were actively fighting for RTW passage in the state legislatures. As *Fortune* reported in September 1957, "very few of the largest corporations have taken a position [on RTW] one way or the other," with General Electric being a notable

¹²³ Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 71-72; " 'Right-to-Work' Drive," *New York Times*, 2 April 1956, 26.

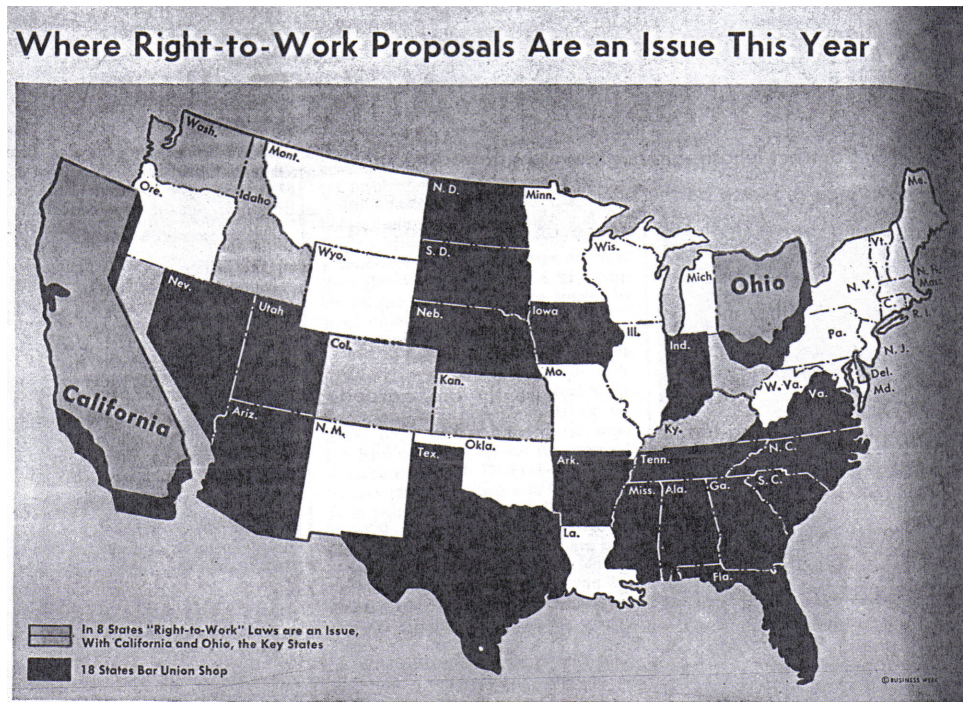
¹²⁴ " 'Work' Laws Seen Mitchell Target," *New York Times*, 4 August 1956, 21.

¹²⁵ "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters," *New York Times*, 18 April 1957, 16.

¹²⁶ "Attack on Union Shop Resumes," *Business Week*, 12 April 1958, 130.

exception due to its strong support for RTW. In addition, the national headquarters of the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) were not convinced that their efforts were best spent in the middle of hotly contested state political battles.¹²⁷

Figure 1. States with RTW Previously Enacted or on the Ballot in 1958.¹²⁸



Indiana, where RTW had been implemented in March 1957, confirmed this trend. Making Indiana a RTW state had been no easy task. In 1955, organized labor in Indiana counted some 400,000 members, with 220,000 those in CIO unions. Furthermore, seventy-eight percent of Indiana labor union contracts included some sort of union security provision. After narrowly passing both houses of the Indiana legislature, which Republicans controlled, Republican Governor Harold Handley allowed the RTW bill to become a law without his signature.¹²⁹ Jack Reich, executive vice-president of the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce explained to a

¹²⁷ "The Right-to-Work Laws," *Fortune*, September 1957, 236.

¹²⁸ From "Attack on Union Shop Resumes," *Business Week*, 12 April 1958, 130.

¹²⁹ Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 96.

reporter that big business took a “hands off” approach to RTW in the state, and that “it was the pressure from small business that got the law passed.” An Indiana labor-relations counselor explained the appeal of RTW to small businesses this way:

The open- versus closed-shop fight is certainly not new in this country, but the conflict has a new significance today. The rapidly growing economic and political power of unions and the trend toward monopoly in business genuinely frightens many small businessmen and professional people who fear that they’ll be crushed between these two giant forces. The ‘right-to-work’ law is a counterattack.¹³⁰

The Indiana experience with RTW had a definite impact on both business and labor. For business, the message was that early organization, professional lobbying, and a coalition of state and local chambers of commerce could get the measure enacted. For labor, RTW’s passage in Indiana served as a wake-up call. One historian has remarked that RTW in the state “was truly an ignominious defeat for Indiana’s labor lobby.” Indiana labor had been divided, and, in the midst of divisive intra-union bickering, had been unable to respond to attacks from business groups. The lesson was clear: if labor wanted to defeat RTW measures, it had to close ranks and get organized.¹³¹

Furthermore, business leaders were unsure of the impact of RTW laws on labor relations. In the states where RTW had been enacted, union membership levels had remained flat or actually increased, enforcement of RTW laws was cumbersome and ineffective, and there was little evidence of businesses choosing to locating facilities in RTW states because of the presence of RTW alone.¹³² Despite all this, business leaders were taking an increasingly reactionary tone in response to labor’s perceived political strength, especially after the national merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955-1956. As Charles R. Hook, Chairman of Middletown, Ohio’s ARMCO

¹³⁰ James A. Maxwell, “ ‘Right to Work’ Along the Wabash,” *The Reporter*, 30 October 1958, 17, 19.

¹³¹ Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 95-97.

¹³² “The Right-to-Work Laws,” *Fortune*, September 1957, 235-36.

Steel Corporation, and a close O'Neill friend, wrote to the president of NAM: "Ever since last November [1956] I have been tremendously concerned over the political plans of the labor bosses. From all that I have said, you will realize how scared I am and how serious I think the situation is."¹³³

RTW was increasingly becoming an issue that attracted major national attention. Speakers were beginning to discuss the topic and newspapers were increasingly filled with stories about pushes for RTW in different states. The intercollegiate debate topic for 1957-1958 asked whether "the requirement of membership in a labor organization as a condition employment should be illegal."¹³⁴ Furthermore, union newspapers and material were far ahead of both the business and popular press when it came to RTW. In early 1957, before RTW ever became official in Ohio, readers of the *Columbus C.I.O. News* would have already been very familiar with the topic. A June 1957 union editorial captures this public relations campaign well. Under a cartoon depicting "labor without rights" as Little Red Riding Hood and RTW proponent as the Big Bad Wolf, the *Columbus C.I.O. News* told of the evils of the "'Right to Work' Hoax": "Such laws take away your rights, and will take away your good wages and union conditions. Help spread the message, 'Right to Work' means 'Right to Wreck'—both you and your union!"¹³⁵ It was June, five months before the Ohio Chamber of Commerce would publicly announce a RTW drive in Ohio, and organized labor was already waging a public battle against the measure.

On October 16, 1957 the Ohio Chamber of Commerce (OCC) met for its annual meeting at the Deshler-Hilton hotel in Columbus to hash out the organization's approach to the RTW issue. A month before, the OCC Board of Directors had met in a closed-door session to prepare

¹³³ Gall, *The Politics of Right to Work*, 73.

¹³⁴ "Colleges to Debate 'Right to Work,'" *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 14 October 1957, 2.

¹³⁵ "'Right to Work' Hoax," Editorial, *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 3 June 1957, 6.

for the RTW drive, and in September a group of three disgruntled former railroad workers calling themselves Ohio Labor for the Right-to-Work, Inc. had filed incorporation papers with the secretary of state.¹³⁶ Herschel C. Atkinson, executive vice president of the OCC and a close friend of Governor O'Neill, brought the October OCC meeting to order for a momentous discussion. After offering the caveat that the phrase "Right-to-Work" was actually a "misnomer in judgment," Atkinson laid out the reasons for business interest in an open shop ballot measure. "The sympathy and support of the people for the growth and development of the unions," Atkins told his listeners, "has now resulted in an overreaching in the use of powers thus gained, and of grave abuses."¹³⁷ Despite the feeling that overreaching unions must be stopped, Atkinson tried to emphasize that the Chamber was not anti-union and that his remarks were not intended to be interpreted as an attack on unionism: "Our Board, our Officers, and our paid staff would like to have every member understand that beyond any shadow of doubt, there is no consideration of an effort to destroy or injure any proper functioning of unions."¹³⁸ It was this same precarious balancing act—pushing for RTW while claiming to be pro-union—that would challenge the RTW forces throughout the next twelve months.

It is not as if this most recent version of labor/management strife was entirely new for Ohio. In skirmishes that dated back to before O'Neill had won the Republican nomination for governor in 1956, the Ohio Republican party had been accused of being anti-labor. In March 1956, state Representative Elton Kile (R.-Plain City), who later became one of the official drafters of the Ohio RTW measure in 1958, had introduced a bill in the Ohio legislature to limit

¹³⁶ Remarks of Herschel C. Atkinson, Executive Vice President of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, Annual Membership Meeting, Columbus, 16 October 1957, Charles Baker Collection, WPRL, Wayne State University, Detroit, Box 2, "Ohio—Background of RTW," 1-3; Also, see "Phony 'Labor' Group Pushing for Right-to-Scab Legislation in Ohio," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 16 September 1957, 1; and, Ohio CIO Council News Release, 12 September 1957, OH AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 47, "Right-to-Work, 1953-1961," 1.

¹³⁷ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 1-3.

¹³⁸ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 3.

political campaign contributions from unions, and state Senator Robert Pollock (R.-Canton) introduced a RTW bill.¹³⁹ While both bills failed to materialize as legislation, the party received no breaks from the anti-labor sentiment of its more conservative members. And while the actual battle over RTW in Ohio was two years removed from the 1956 gubernatorial race, the Ohio CIO newspaper blasted the 1956 Republican platform in Ohio for not taking a stand on RTW. In 1956, the Democrats won early union support for their firm stance in opposition to RTW laws.¹⁴⁰ While the CIO's endorsement of DiSalle in the 1956 race for governor was largely the result of the Democratic platform plank on RTW, the *C.I.O. News* also had plenty negative to say about C. William O'Neill. After examining O'Neill's legislative votes as an Ohio House member, the Ohio CIO Council concluded that O'Neill had too often not been a friend of labor, and they cautioned about the impact on labor if O'Neill was elected. In 1956, however, O'Neill was endorsed by the more moderate AFL and by the Teamsters Union, and many independent labor groups did not feel threatened by the progressive governor.¹⁴¹ For all its supposed weakness as an unmerged body, Ohio labor sent an ominous warning to RTW proponents in the November 1956 race. Senator Pollock, who had last introduced a legislative attempt at getting RTW enacted in Ohio, lost his reelection bid to his Democratic opponent.¹⁴² Still, RTW in Ohio was not an entirely partisan issue. In August 1957, the ever-independent Senator Frank Lausche went on NBC's "Meet the Press" to announce his early support for RTW.¹⁴³ Lausche, however, did not have to face the voters in 1958 like his state-level political colleagues in Ohio. As these events show, there was a certain reservoir of indigenous political sentiment in support of RTW in

¹³⁹ "Impartial Committee Aims Its Guns at Organized Labor," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 12 March 1956, 1; "GOP Is Labor's Friend, Republican Leader Says—But Facts Disagree," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 16 April 1956, 1.

¹⁴⁰ "Worker Fares Better in Democratic State Platform; Ohio GOP Is Evasive," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 24 September 1956, 1.

¹⁴¹ "Record Shows O'Neill Not Friend of Labor," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 29 October 1956, 9.

¹⁴² "GOP to Run Legislature," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 12 November 1956, 1.

¹⁴³ "Labor Curb Favored," *New York Times*, 26 August 1957, 42.

Ohio. The 1958 RTW drive in the state was not the result of the machinations of national organizations like NAM or the United States Chamber of Commerce testing the political waters in Ohio. RTW in Ohio came about because of a genuine division among Ohioans about the role of unions in the state's economy.

After Atkinson spoke, Ray Suter, director of industrial relations for the OCC, reported on a poll of 2,200 Chamber members concerning the RTW issue. Suter explained that his department had found that "52.25% of our members negotiate [with unions] ... In other words, half of the membership of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce deals with unions." After asking whether a law to prohibit compulsory unionism should be enacted, nearly 97 percent of the membership felt it should, with only a small fraction disagreeing, and the rest having no opinion. Suter's survey then asked the respondents, "If a state-wide referendum on [RTW] were to be held, do you believe a majority of Ohio electorate would cast their vote to prohibit compulsory union membership?" To that question, 76.48 percent of OCC members responded that they believed the people would support a RTW measure, but only 43 percent of those answering yes represented unionized business, which meant that 57 percent of those arguing that the people of Ohio would get behind a RTW measure had a decidedly non-union perspective.¹⁴⁴

When Suter finished presenting the numbers, Atkinson returned to the podium to give a rather depressing talk for a group about to embark on a year-long political battle. Atkinson explained that lobbying efforts in the legislature on the behalf of organized labor made pursuing RTW through an initiative referendum on the ballot, as opposed to through legislation in the General Assembly, the preferable method. The legislative approach had been tried in Ohio, and in the five times RTW bills had been introduced in the General Assembly, they had failed every

¹⁴⁴ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 4-5.

time.¹⁴⁵ Atkinson laid out the timeline for a ballot measure: “The quickest that there could be such a vote, in the judgment of most people, is the fall of 1959. It might, however, be possible by the fall of 1958.” Atkinson then moved to the costs of such a fight with organized labor. Using the SUBs experience, which had cost each side \$500,000, as his guide, Atkinson predicted that RTW would cost each side somewhere in the vicinity of \$1,000,000, and the petitions to get the measure on the ballot would likely cost \$1 per signature. In 1958, 354,210 valid signatures would be required by August 6, 1958 to qualify RTW for the ballot.¹⁴⁶ Finally, Atkinson offered his listeners one last warning: “An ill-conceived campaign, in which Ohio, as the largest industrial state to undertake such legislation, should it fail, would create very serious complications in our labor relations and in our industrial climate for many years.”¹⁴⁷

After much expressed reservation, a resolution on RTW was put up for consideration by the assembled members of the OCC. The resolution explained “that by action taken September 18, 1957, the Board of Directors of the OCC concluded that a poll of its members had established a preponderant conviction among officers of firms represented therein” to pursue RTW legislation in Ohio. After the simple resolution was read, OCC President Harry W. Arnold made a motion to have someone move for the resolution’s passage. Frank J. Egner, a trucking firm owner who later became the chairman of Ohioans for Right to Work, Inc. (ORW), made the motion for passage, and after a voice vote carried the motion, a RTW drive had become a reality in Ohio.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of how RTW proponents came to favor the referendum technique, see Gall, *Politics of Right to Work*, 97; Anthony J. Disantis, “Right to Work Issue is Overwhelmingly Defeated,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1958, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 5-6; For number of signatures, see “A Vote on ‘Right-to-Work,’” Editorial, *The Toledo Blade*, 17 August 1958, II-4; “Attack on Union Shop Resumes,” *Business Week*, 12 April 1958, 130.

¹⁴⁷ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Remarks of Atkinson, OCC, 16 October 1957, Baker Collection, WPRL, 6-7.

Perhaps in no other episode of Ohio history has such a momentous political decision, which eventually would have a far-reaching political impact, been made by such a group of non-politicians. While the Indiana RTW provision had included an escape-hatch for existing labor contracts, the greedy drafters of the Ohio measure were not interested in a partial RTW victory. If passed, the RTW amendment to the Ohio Constitution would have invalidated eighty-two percent of all Ohio labor-management agreements in a state that was primarily engaged in heavy manufacturing and industry.¹⁴⁹ No one has yet been able to ascertain why this group of intelligent business men thought that their poll was truly reflective of the feelings of Ohioans on the matter, or why they thought that a rushed effort to get RTW on the ballot in 1958 was the best method to secure its passage. Perhaps, as tight-fisted businessmen, they understood that because the number of signatures required to place an issue on the ballot was dependent on the turnout in previous elections, and because Ohio's population was growing rapidly, each election cycle in the near future would raise the number of signatures required to place RTW on the ballot, and thus raise the expense of doing so.

It is quite likely that the members of the OCC thought the time was ripe for a strike at an Ohio labor movement weakened by the fight over SUBs and a national labor movement weakened by revelations of racketeering and corruption. It is also important to realize that as of the October 1957, the state bodies of the AFL and CIO in Ohio remained unmerged, and with labor divided and no statewide officeholders to trumpet its views, labor appeared to have no political organization readily available for a political response.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps, however, the OCC members were just impatient and far too excited about the prospect of delivering a death blow to union security. Perhaps that perceived labor weakness was an intoxicant for Ohio's business

¹⁴⁹ Wayne Phillips, "Labor is Dazzled by Ohio Victory," *New York Times*, 6 November 1958, 15.

¹⁵⁰ "Attack on Union Shop Resumes," *Business Week*, 12 April 1958, 130.

leaders, and the conservative risk assessment that one typically associates with successful businesses was not made. There is no doubt that in the limited papers and documents we have from business sources, no consideration was made of the potential *political* consequences of an unsuccessful ballot measure. While Atkinson warned his listeners about the implications for labor/management relations if a RTW drive failed, he did not warn the audience about the political implications of a failed RTW drive. The sense one gets from studying the early movement in support of RTW in Ohio is that RTW proponents believed that the issue would be fought out in a political vacuum, free from political party and candidate involvement. That was not to be the case. Whatever their motivation, this group of businessmen ignored Atkinson's warnings about a half-hearted push for RTW and introduced the issue into Ohio's political climate in the fall of 1957. Just one year later, they would pay the price for their poor judgment.

VII. 'RIGHT-TO-WORK'

The pro-"Right-to-Work" movement was barely off the ground when labor began organizing for a response. In October 1957, when the dust had barely settled on the minutes from the OCC annual meeting on October 16, the *Columbus C.I.O. News* lashed back at the OCC. Harry Mayfield, president of the Columbus CIO Council, used his weekly column to call his members to action: "This is the time to start our campaign against the Chamber's 'right-to-work' program. This is the time to realize that your enemies mean business Now is the time to start OUR fight!"¹⁵¹ Short of declaring "this is war," Mayfield had thrown down the gauntlet. A month later, one of the key themes of the Ohio RTW battle was laid out in the pages of the *Columbus C.I.O. News*. After citing United States Commerce Department per capita income statistics, the Ohio CIO was able to show that in each of the eighteen states with RTW (except for Nevada) the per capita income was both lower than in Ohio and lower than the national

¹⁵¹ "From the President's Desk," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 28 October 1957, 5.

average. The question posed by the editorial would be one that pro-RTW groups would struggle to answer throughout the coming campaign: “Does the Ohio Chamber of Commerce want to pull Ohio’s economy down to the level of the ‘right to work’ states?”¹⁵²

The response of organized labor to efforts to enact RTW in Ohio had been swift and effective from the beginning. In September 1957, when three disgruntled former railroad union members formed Ohio Labor for the Right to Work, Inc., the Ohio CIO Council was quick to use the occasion as a rallying cry for its members. On September 13, the Ohio CIO dispatched a memo to all its member units and officers announcing that a voter registration effort should get underway immediately. The day after public reports surfaced of the October 16, 1957 meeting of the OCC, the CIO Council again was quick to respond: “NOW is the time to realize that our enemies mean business. This is no longer a ‘cold war’ of possibilities ... this is it ... this is a hot war and the chips are down. NOW is the time to begin action ... even tomorrow may be too late.”¹⁵³

Instead of waiting for the national headquarters of the different labor unions, whose political efforts were scattered throughout the ten or more states where RTW proponents were threatening to put the issue on the 1958 ballot, to spring into action, Ohio’s organized labor leaders took matters into their own hands. On November 20, 1957, representatives of the Ohio bodies of the AFL (OFL), the Ohio CIO, the United Mine Workers (UMW), and the Transportation Railroad Brotherhoods met in the Deshler-Hilton ballroom in Columbus to formulate a coordinated response to the Chamber’s decision to pursue RTW. A merger of the Ohio AFL and CIO bodies was still several months away, and organized labor realized that it did not have the luxury of waiting for the merger to occur to respond to the new RTW drive. At this

¹⁵² “What the Chamber Risks for Ohio,” *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 25 November 1957, 6.

¹⁵³ Ohio CIO Council Memo to All Units and Officers, 18 October 1957, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 48, Folder 10, “Ohio Campaign, 1958,” 1.

meeting, a decision was made to form a Steering Committee made up of at least three representatives from each organization. The combined union organization represented more than 1,250,000 members of organized labor, and called itself United Organized Labor of Ohio (UOLO).¹⁵⁴ The UOLO Steering Committee eventually had thirteen members. Among the members were: Michael J. Lyden, president of the Ohio Federation of Labor (OFL); Phil Hannah, secretary-treasurer of the OFL; Ray Ross, president of the Ohio CIO Council; William Finnegan, executive secretary, Cleveland Federation of Labor; three representatives of the UMW; a representative of the Cincinnati Amalgamated Clothing Workers; and four representatives from the railroad unions.¹⁵⁵ From the very first UOLO meeting, voter registration was a primary goal. It was decided that “an all-out campaign ... to get every member registered to vote was emphasized by speakers as the labor meeting as the most effective answer to the Chamber’s plans for a ‘right-to-work’ law.”¹⁵⁶

The situation did not improve for those seeking enactment of RTW as winter turned into spring. It must have felt like an avalanche of bad news. On March 24, 1958, Ohio’s six Catholic Bishops announced their firm opposition to RTW laws in a public statement. The six bishops—representing Cincinnati, Cleveland, Youngstown, Toledo, Steubenville, and Columbus—were sure to play a big role in the fall campaign. As if the official opposition of the Roman Catholic Church was not enough, seven days later, Ohio’s most well-known Jewish leader, the Rabbi Abba H. Silver of Cleveland came out in a blistering attack against RTW. The editorial page of the *Akron Beacon Journal* had attacked RTW in December 1957, and in early April 1958, the *Toledo Blade* brought the notorious fury of its editorial page to the fight against RTW. What

¹⁵⁴ John R. Rooney Mailer to Union Leaders, 21 November 1957, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 18, Folder 18, “Right to Work, 1957,” 1.

¹⁵⁵ UOLO Letterhead, John R. Rooney to Ray C. Bliss, 3 February 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 49, Folder 5, “RTW, In Favor, 1950, 1956-1958, 1960,” 1.

¹⁵⁶ “Name Group to Fight ‘Wreck’ Law,” *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 25 November 1957, 1.

must have surely frightened business, however, was the announcement that as of May 7, 1958 the “house of Ohio labor” would be united—the separate bodies of the Ohio CIO and AFL were to be merged as one entity in a public ceremony in Cleveland. That same day, in a far lesser-known story, Walter Davis, a “veteran Ohio labor newspaper editor” for fifteen years with America’s oldest labor newspaper, *The Cleveland Citizen*, was announced as the new head of UOLO.¹⁵⁷ Somewhat unexpectedly, it was Davis’s appointment, and his subsequent hiring of public relations manager Charles Baker to run the campaign against RTW, that became the most significant of all these events for the defeat of RTW in 1958.

Baker had once worked for the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Ohio before joining the BURR Public Relations Agency in Toledo. The BURR Agency was a liberal group that was often hired to handle public relations tasks for labor unions and liberal political groups. A decision had been made during a January 27 meeting of the UOLO Steering Committee to have Don Smith, director of public relations for the Ohio CIO Council, explore the availability and competency of public relations firms for labor’s anti-RTW campaign. Then, a final decision to hire a professional public relations firm was made during a UOLO advisory committee meeting at the Seneca Hotel in Columbus on February 21. On February 25, Ray Ross, who had been director of the UAW region that included Ohio before becoming the president of the Ohio CIO Council, wrote to John Rooney, Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio CIO, to recommend unequivocally hiring Baker for the fall campaign. Citing Baker’s successful public relations work against General Electric during a 1953 strike in Cincinnati, Ross explained that “in my association with Chuck Baker I have always found him to be a prolific writer with the necessary

¹⁵⁷ “Ohio Catholic Bishops Oppose ‘Work’ Law,” 24 March 1958, 1; “Rabbi Blasts ‘Scab’ Laws,” 31 March 1958, 1; “Toledo Blade Joins List of Papers Opposing ‘Work’ Law,” 7 April 1958; “Ohio Merger Becomes Reality: House of Ohio Labor is United,” 5 May 1958, 1; “Name Director in ‘Work’ Fight,” 5 May 1958, 1, all in *Columbus C.I.O. News*; Also, see “6 Catholic Bishops Hit ‘Right-to-Work,’” *New York Times*, 21 March 1958, 45.

resourcefulness that should give us an advantage in the campaign.”¹⁵⁸ At a UOLO meeting on April 21, Walt Davis was officially hired at the rate of \$12,500 a year and with all his expenses paid. At the same meeting, Phil Hannah, Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio Federation of Labor, presented a report on hiring an advertising agency, the Robert Wiltman Agency of Pittsburgh, and a public relations agency, Baker’s BURR Agency of Toledo. Baker was invited into the meeting to make a sales pitch and he “emphasized that the public relations program should be aimed at keeping the opposition on the defensive.” After Baker and Wiltman left the room, and the UOLO Steering Committee discussed both proposals, the BURR Agency and the Wiltman Agency were both hired for the last six months of the campaign against RTW.¹⁵⁹

While everything seemed to be going labor’s way in the RTW battle, the groups pushing for the measure were encountering difficulties. Fred J. Milligan, the hardworking Columbus attorney who led the Ohio Information Committee (OIC) in its fight against SUBs in 1955 and in 1958, announced that he and his group was publicly staying out of the RTW fight. Milligan was a fiscal conservative who was primarily concerned about keeping taxes and state spending low. He was not interested in wasting his time and money on an issue like RTW that might not deliver any practical results. The loss of an organizer and proven anti-labor fighter like Milligan was a crucial blow to the pro-RTW forces. It was Milligan, not the Republican Party, who was largely responsible for keeping labor at bay during the SUBs battle that preceded RTW. Milligan could organize, raise money, and get his views across in the press. Milligan’s OIC had spent \$450,000 in its fight against RTW, and “a lot of that money came out of the heavily industrial Cleveland

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of the Steering Committee of UOLO, 27 January 1958, OH-AFLCIO, Box 48, Folder 26, “Right-to-Work, 1957-1958, 1961-1963,” 1; Minutes of Meeting of the UOLO Advisory Committee on the Right-to-Work Campaign, Seneca Hotel, 21 February 1958, OH-AFLCIO, Box 48, Folder 10, “Ohio Campaign, 1958,” 1; Ray Ross to John Rooney, 25 February 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 1, “Correspondence—Feb.-June 1958,” 1.

¹⁵⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee of UOLO, Seneca Hotel, 21 April 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 48, Folder 26, “Right-to-Work, 1957-1958, 1961-1963,” 1.

area. Without this money, and the enthusiastic support of industry in the Cleveland area, SUB might not have been defeated at the polls.”¹⁶⁰ The fundraising woes endured by RTW proponents are an accurate reflection of problems that the push for RTW had in general. Contributions to RTW supporters were not tax-deductible, they had to be reported to the secretary of state, and thus the identity of donors to RTW campaigns was part of the public record. Those businesses concerned with their public image were simply not willing to make their support of RTW public. Furthermore, “some employers are reportedly saying they do not think a recession period is a good time to accelerate labor disturbances,” given that “sympathy” would work in labor’s favor during bad economic times.¹⁶¹ Organized labor’s fundraising efforts were actually helped by the unusual nature of the statewide RTW battle. Federal law prohibited the direct use of union dues on national political activity. RTW was a state rather than a federal matter, however, and the use of regular dues to fight RTW was fair game.¹⁶²

Three groups were involved in the push for RTW in Ohio, but all three were really controlled by the same leadership. Ohioans for Right-to-Work, Inc. (ORW), which was formed immediately after the OCC’s decision to pursue RTW was made in October 1957, was the first on the scene. In 1958, the Committee for the Petitioners, whose purpose was to get RTW on the 1958 ballot, was formed, and eventually, on September 19, 1958, the Right to Work Campaign Committee (RTWCC) was formed to take over the campaign after the petitioners were successful in getting the RTW measure on the ballot. Former state Senator Theodore M. Gray, Sr., was the head of both ORW and the RTWCC, having the title of executive director of ORW and executive secretary of the RTWCC. Former state Representative Elton Kile, author of

¹⁶⁰ “Anti-Union Shop Clause Gets Couple of Blow,” *Columbus Citizen*, 16 February 1958, 7D.

¹⁶¹ “Anti-Union Shop Clause Gets Couple of Blow,” *Columbus Citizen*, 16 February 1958, 7D.

¹⁶² Minutes of Meeting of the UOLO Advisory Committee on the Right-to-Work Campaign, Seneca Hotel, 21 February 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 48, Folder 10, “Ohio Campaign, 1958,” 1.

controversial anti-labor legislation introduced in the General Assembly earlier in the 1950s, became chairman of the RTWCC, after serving as vice chairman of ORW. Frank J. Egner, a trucking firm owner from Galion, was the chairman of ORW and secretary of the RTWCC. Finally, Calvin Verity, a former vice president of ARMCO Steel and the chairman of the First National Bank in Middletown, served as the treasurer (and therefore chief fundraiser) in both organizations.¹⁶³ All four of these men had long histories of combating labor unions. Kile and Gray had been the authors of anti-labor measures in previous session of the Ohio General Assembly, and both were instrumental in killing the pro-union Fair Employment Practices bill in the Ohio legislature in 1946. All of these men were veterans of the SUBs fight, and so had firm beliefs as to the proper way to defeat the labor unions in political combat.

Political advertisements played a large role in the 1958 Ohio RTW campaign. By January 13, advertisements against RTW had started running in the labor press, with a full-page advertisement in the *Columbus C.I.O. News* warning readers not to be “fooled” by RTW.¹⁶⁴ Shortly after it became clear that the RTW was in fact going to qualify for the November ballot in Ohio, high-quality, professional advertisements began to run on a statewide schedule. The first advertisement rolled out by UOLO included the word “EXPOSED!” in large print across the top of a photograph with the caption reading: “\$250,000 worth of Right-to-Work petitions being hauled in an armored car to the Secretary of State. Note both guards have gun drawn.” The advertisement was a direct attack on the OCC and the National Association of Manufacturers. By the end of August 1958, plans were in place to run the “Exposed!” advertisement in eighteen

¹⁶³ “What is Kile’s Role in Front Group to Cover Fund Sources?,” BURR Agency Memo, 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 3, “Opposition—Personnel Folder,” 1.

¹⁶⁴ See *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 13 January 1958, 5.

newspapers in fifteen cities.¹⁶⁵ Two months remained before the election, and organized labor in Ohio was placing business on the defensive. A small box ran at the bottom of each of the UOLO advertisements to explain that the “same big business interests which are FOR the Tricky ‘Right-to-Work’ Law are AGAINST: Child Labor Legislation, Civil Rights Legislation, Minimum Wage Laws, Social Security, Aid to the Aged, and Unemployment Compensation.”¹⁶⁶ It was that list of six hard-fought social and economic gains won by organized labor in the decades before RTW that voters were continually reminded of in the fall campaign. At least to those in union households, the message was loud and clear: if the open shop could be stripped away by aggressive action on the part of business groups, any of these union gains could suffer the same fate.

The groups fighting against RTW in Ohio were far ahead when it came to advertising. In addition to the standard materials that suggested that wages and job security would decline in the wake of RTW’s passage, UOLO and other labor groups seemed to have a greater understanding of the value of professional, modern advertising campaigns. Matt Amberg, who provided Baker with a synopsis of the literature on RTW, explained that “by skillful selection of the right years and by ignoring pertinent factors,” RTW proponents could “‘prove’ anything they wish.” As Amberg explained, the jury was still out on the impact of RTW laws on a state’s business climate and labor relations.¹⁶⁷ The lesson for organized labor, then, was that with respect to defeating RTW it was not *what* was said during the campaign, but *how* it was delivered. In a confidential memo to Walt Davis on August 1, 1958, Charles Baker undertook a detailed consideration of how best to transmit the arguments against RTW to the people. In a section labeled “To Survey

¹⁶⁵ Advertising Invoice, Robert Wiltman Advertising Agency Co., Inc., 22 August 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 1, “Advertisements-4.”

¹⁶⁶ “Exposed!,” Advertisement Proof, n.d., Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 1, “Advertisements-1”; Also, see the same advertisement in *The Cleveland Press*, 9 September 1958.

¹⁶⁷ Matt Amberg to Charles Baker, 28 September 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 1, “Amberg, Matt,” 1.

or Not to Survey,” Baker pointed out the UOLO started far behind, given the results of an early 1957 Gallup Poll showing that the public favored RTW by nearly a two to one margin. “If R-T-W were voted on today,” Baker wrote to Davis, “it almost certainly would pass. A lot of people wouldn’t know what they were voting on.” Arguing that the marginal votes that would make or break RTW were centered in areas where light press coverage had left voters uninformed on the issue, Baker felt it was essential to reach these voters “with the arguments to which they are most receptive.” Baker laid out for Davis the advantages and disadvantages of conducting a professional survey of the most effective arguments against RTW. Baker was clearly in favor of using professional research in the campaign: “All campaigns are full of intangibles A scientific argument sampling provides the nearest thing you can get to a tangible guide.” Two professors at Ohio State University, Wallace C. Fotheringham and Franklin H. Knowler, had provided Baker with a research plan (and a maximum budget of \$4,000), which Baker forwarded to Davis with the suggestion that a decision on the hiring the two researchers be made quickly.¹⁶⁸

In a less than a week, UOLO had in fact decided to hire Fotheringham and Knowler to conduct a survey, and their twenty-two-page report became crucial to the success of the last two months of the campaign against RTW. The initial conclusions had to be encouraging for Baker, who felt that organized labor was running from behind in the RTW battle. Fotheringham and Knowler reported that only 10.74 percent of their sample of 580 was strongly in favor of the pro-RTW arguments, 16.54 percent felt strongly about the arguments against RTW, and, surprisingly (given that by this point it was nearly September) nearly one-third of the sample was undecided on the issue. Furthermore, when those with moderate and strong beliefs on RTW were combined, arguments against RTW swayed more of the panel than arguments in favor of RTW

¹⁶⁸ Tactics and Strategy Memo, BURR Agency to Walt Davis, 1 August 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 3, “Petition Drive, Tactics and Strategy of UOLO,” 3-6.

did. Arguments in favor of the measure that mentioned labor corruption or the “un-American” nature of compulsory unionism were the most preferred, followed by those arguments against RTW that mentioned the opposition of church groups or that open shop law allowed “free-riders” to benefit unfairly from unions. Some of the study’s findings on the preference of subgroups were also instructive. Catholics, Fotheringham and Knower reported, tended to be more against RTW than Protestants; the preference of housewives regarding RTW tended to reflect the occupational status of their husbands; and, as Baker had originally suspected, “substantial numbers of persons interviewed have little knowledge or understanding of this issue.”¹⁶⁹

As promised in his memo to Walt Davis, Baker was ready to quickly adapt the argument survey results to the UOLO campaign against RTW. After deciding that the campaign should focus more heavily on the “majority rule” and “free rider” arguments, Baker offered up an additional theme: “any way we can point to ourselves as upholding the American way and any way we can point to R-T-W as ‘Un-American’ will work to our advantage. Though the terms have become quite meaningless, happily few people seem to notice and still get stirred up by them.” The Fotheringham and Knower study worked to further Baker’s cynicism about the best way to win the battle against RTW: “Since most uncommitted voters are not likely to be swayed by the real merits of our position, anyway, the best way to present them is with minimal explanation and maximum punch—threats and doomsday prophesy.” Baker was a true public relations man, and not a politician. He might have been sympathetic to the goals of organized labor, but the BURR Agency had been brought in for one simple task, to beat RTW, and that was the main focus. Referring to the expected onslaught from business groups in the campaign, one

¹⁶⁹ Wallace C. Fotheringham and Franklin H. Knower, “Survey: ‘Right to Work’ Arguments,” August 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, “Survey of RTW Arguments.”

of Baker's staffers wrote: "It's the vote that's important, not necessarily the conviction of the voter."¹⁷⁰

Advertisements were typically geared to a single group, such as older persons who had fought for and won social security benefits, or housewives who were told they would have less to spend on household goods if RTW passed. By June 1958, 2.2 million copies of the "Good Wages" pamphlet had been distributed, along with 246,025 copies of "Mrs. Ohio Homemaker," 278,925 copies of "Ohio's Catholic Bishops," 208,925 copies of "Ohio Council of Churches," and 130,125 copies of "Rabbi Silver." By five months before the election, in what remains as one of the largest literature distribution campaigns ever in Ohio, over four million pieces of literature had been printed, with over three million pieces distributed.¹⁷¹ In addition, anti-RTW advertisements were carefully designed as emotional appeals rather than factual ones. One prominent advertisement explained that the most well-known members of Ohio's Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergies all opposed RTW. Other advertisements used quotes from Republicans such as Abraham Lincoln, President Eisenhower, Labor Secretary James Mitchell, and even the Tafts (both William Howard Taft and the late Senator Robert A. Taft) to demonstrate sympathy to workers, unions, or the union shop.¹⁷²

Baker and his public relations team, however, did not rely entirely on advertisements to get their message across. Any method of reaching voters was considered. One of the key campaign tools became the use of a SURVAD machine, which was an automatic telemarketing device. The SURVAD machine could dial five numbers a minute, and deliver a recording up to

¹⁷⁰ The documents in this file are internal memos from the BURR Agency and are undated. Charles Baker, BURR Agency Memo on Opinion Survey; "Proposed Public Relations Aims and Strategy" Memo, BURR Agency; all in Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 4, "Thinking File."

¹⁷¹ UOLO, "Distribution of Literature," 17 June 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 49, "Ohio- Union Material, 1956-1958, 1960, 1962," 1.

¹⁷² Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 1, See the four folders marked "Advertisements."

forty-three seconds long. For \$30,000, UOLO received exclusive access to the SURVAD device, which had only been used once before in an Ohio political campaign. Baker calculated that the telemarketing device, which was eventually used with an anti-RTW recording of Eleanor Roosevelt's voice, could make an "impression" on 400,000 voters.¹⁷³ In addition, Baker and his team developed an elaborate exhibition, which included caged monkeys under the slogan "Don't let them make monkeys out of us—Fight the phony amendment," for display at twenty-two different county fairs in 1958.¹⁷⁴ Baker and his team were pulling out all the stops for a multifaceted campaign against RTW. Fact books, speech outlines, and talking points were distributed throughout the state for the benefit for speakers on the issue. The press was given special attention and access to fiery quotes. A growing list of community groups opposed to RTW was amassed, and UOLO managed to portray the measure as being pursued for the pure self-interest of the very few groups supporting the measure. The fact that these groups, which included the OCC, the NAM, and the NRTWC, had long been foes of organized labor made the public relations campaign all the more easier.¹⁷⁵

The Ohio Republicans had only slowly gotten involved with the dangerous RTW drive. On July 21, 1958, ARMCO Steel's Charles Hook called a highly confidential meeting at the Queen City Club in Cincinnati of top Republican and business leaders to discuss the Republicans' approach to RTW. Hook cautioned O'Neill that "it is very, very important that the fact that this meeting is to be held should be kept very quiet and confidential in order to prevent anything appearing in the press."¹⁷⁶ Among the attendees at the meeting were O'Neill, Bliss,

¹⁷³ BURR Agency Memo to Walter Davis, 13 August 1958, Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 3, "Phone Gimmick," 1-2.

¹⁷⁴ "Dramatize 'Scab Law' Fight," *Columbus C.I.O. News*, 12 May 1958, 1; Proposed Itinerary for County Fair Exhibits, n.d., Baker Collection, WPRL, Box 2, "County Fairs," 1.

¹⁷⁵ See *Fact Book for Speakers Against Issue 2: The Trick-Titled 'Right-to-Work' Proposal*, UOLO, 1958, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 47, Folder 21, "RTW, General Info, 1957-1958, 1965, 1967."

¹⁷⁶ Charles R. Hook to CWO, 17 July 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 43, "Right to Work (1)," 1.

John Bricker, OCC leader Herschel Atkinson, Ohio Manufacturers' Association leader Don Wiper, National Cash Register Chairman S.C. Allyn, Federated Department Stores Chairman Fred Lazarus, Jr., Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. Chairman J. L. Mauthe, Proctor & Gamble President Howard J. Morgens, Standard Oil Chairman A. A. Stambaugh, Timken Roller Bearing Co. President William E. Umstattd, and several additional executives representing Hook's ARMCO Steel. It was a high-powered gathering of the most important business leaders in Ohio, who counted among their ranks the leaders of several *Fortune 500* companies. It had originally been suggested that O'Neill stay at home, and his name was listed last on the roster of attendees. The goal of Bliss and Bricker in heading to Cincinnati was to tell the business leaders to back off of RTW, and the sentiment by this point among his fellow Republicans was that the young O'Neill did not have the backbone to stand up to powerful business leaders. Joseph Alsop recorded the sentiment of a Republican colleague of O'Neill's: "If any damn chairman of any damn board calls Bill on the telephone, he just melts."¹⁷⁷

Bliss and Bricker were extremely angry both at business leaders for dragging RTW into the 1958 campaign and at O'Neill for not having the wherewithal to call off the dogs. Furthermore, the OCC's Atkinson had visited Bricker at home earlier in 1958 and promised the senator that the RTW drive would be delayed for a year until 1959. When Atkinson later called Bricker to tell him he had changed his mind, Bricker nearly exploded. Bliss had already made his feelings clear about the idiotic nature of injecting senseless ideological debates into otherwise well-organized political campaigns. After Bricker toyed with the idea of dropping out of his Senate reelection bid, Bliss and Bricker decided to try to talk to some sense into the assembled business leaders in Cincinnati. When Bricker explained that he might lose to the Stephen M.

¹⁷⁷ Joseph Alsop, " 'Ideological Gymnastics' in Cincinnati and the Election," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 November 1958, 6A; July 1958 RTW Meeting Roster, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 43, "Right-to-Work (1)," 1-3.

Young, who had become somewhat of a joke for his long string of unsuccessful bids for public office, in November, some of those in the audience laughed in disbelief.¹⁷⁸ As Alsop explained, “Bricker drew his dignity around him, and took his leave without further ado.” Only Bliss remained to try to salvage the Republicans’ chances for neutrality in the fall RTW campaign. After the business leaders explained to Bliss that RTW would lead the way for the most successful Republican campaign victories in some time, the Ohio Republican Party Chairman realized, like Bricker, that all hope was lost for a common sense discussion with the RTW backers. Bliss, he must have realized then, was lunching with feverishly dedicated ideologues, who saw in RTW a means to the end of relieving the union pressure that seemed to be threatening the competitive edge for businesses. These men were committed to RTW, and no one was going to hold them back now. After Bliss departed the meeting, O’Neill was the only Republican politician left. Sure enough, it was the young Governor, weakened from a heart attack and probably not sure whether he would win his reelection bid in the fall regardless of RTW’s role in the race, who actively agreed with the RTW proponents’ suggestion that the Republicans make the issue the centerpiece of the fall campaign.¹⁷⁹

One wonders whether the Republicans’ slow-moving official response to RTW damaged their image with the voters. The secret happenings at the Queen City Club meeting were not revealed until some time after the election and voters did not realize beforehand that Bliss and Bricker (who made their displeasure with the RTW backers barely known) had in fact tried to stop RTW in 1958. As UOLO’s well-oiled public relations machine rolled on, and the bad news about RTW poured from the pages of the state’s newspapers, the Republicans were either silent or intentionally ambiguous on the matter. Stephen Young, running against John Bricker, and

¹⁷⁸ Davies, *Defender of the Old Guard*, 195-204.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Alsop, “‘Ideological Gymnastics’ in Cincinnati and the Election,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 November 1958, 6A.

O'Neill's opponent, DiSalle, had both made their opposition to RTW clear, and the Ohio Democratic Party platform that year was officially committed to RTW's defeat. While Young and DiSalle never insisted that Bricker and O'Neill were behind the amendment, the two Democrats were the only candidates in their respective races who had taken firm stands. Throughout much of the summer and fall of 1958, voters would have had a difficult time discerning where the Republicans stood on the RTW issue. Speaking in the summer to reporters, Ohio Republican Chairman Bliss did not even seem convinced that RTW had a chance to win. After Ohio Democratic Party Chair William L. Coleman boastfully predicted that the increased labor turnout in the November election would lead to huge Democratic victories, Bliss's only response was to say that labor union activity "certainly will increase the size of the vote" and add an "intangible factor" to the ballot.¹⁸⁰ Bliss, who had wanted to keep his prized stable of Republican candidates out of the RTW mess in the first place, was certainly not going to be the measure's biggest cheerleader in the fall.

By late September 1958, O'Neill had decided to wade, albeit tentatively, into the RTW waters. On September 22, the governor issued a written statement explaining that "personally, as a citizen of Ohio, I am going to vote for the right-to-work amendment." Although he was still not ready to call for all Ohioans to make the decision to support RTW, O'Neill was not hesitant about attacking corrupt unions. It was clear from this first O'Neill statement on the issue that the "growing cancer of corruption" among the labor unions was going to be his justification for any positive stance on RTW. "Given the freedom," O'Neill wrote in his statement, "I am convinced that the working man would take things into his own hands and throw out the racketeers."¹⁸¹ By October, O'Neill had plunged fully into the campaign against RTW by delivering several

¹⁸⁰ "Union Curb Plan Up to Ohio Voters," *New York Times*, 24 August 1958, 54.

¹⁸¹ Ohio Manufacturers' Association Bulletin, no. 29, 24 September 1958, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 43, "Right to Work (4)," 1.

televised addresses against the proposal, and making it clear that he felt that not only was RTW the right personal choice, but that it was the choice that all Ohioans should make on their November ballots.¹⁸²

VIII. RUNNING FOR A SECOND CHANCE

Amid the wrangling over RTW, Governor C. William O'Neill found himself in an unusual situation. For the first time in twenty-two years in public office, some observers thought O'Neill was headed for defeat in November 1958. After RTW became the major political issue of 1958, and his heart attack had left him sitting on the sidelines for several weeks, O'Neill had somewhat moved into the background. Although O'Neill was fortunate enough to avoid a real primary fight in 1958, he was facing a familiar opponent in the general election, Michael V. DiSalle, the same man that he had beat just two years before for the same office. The 1958 general election was largely shaping up as a referendum on O'Neill's first term. This time around, O'Neill could not simply stress his impeccable resume, trot his family out for photo opportunities, or give speeches about hope and optimism and Ohio's "rosy" economic forecast. Ohio had been hit hard by recession, unemployment had affected some counties in a manner not seen since before World War II, and suddenly the outlook put forth by O'Neill in 1956 appeared to have been drawn from fiction rather than reality. O'Neill had repeatedly promised action when running for governor in 1956, and the 1958 race was to be an evaluation of that promise.

Few displayed restraint in evaluating O'Neill's first-term performance. Indecisiveness, inaction, and inexperience were the main complaints with O'Neill's two years in office. One businessman was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, "The Governor just doesn't know how to make up his mind. One day he's for something and the next day he's against it. I voted for him the last time, but I certainly won't this time." A Cleveland Republican explained that

¹⁸² Wayne Phillips, "Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over 'Right-to-Work' Issue," *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 1.

because of O'Neill's three successful terms as attorney general, voters assumed he was a forceful decision-maker. Instead, as one voter in Southern Ohio explained, they learned that once O'Neill was "out of the creek and in the river," he was not such a gifted leader. O'Neill, this voter reasoned, "just doesn't know how to navigate."¹⁸³ Indicative of O'Neill's problems with his administration and with the press was the decision of three newspapers—*The Cleveland Press* (then the largest daily in Ohio), the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, and the *Lorain Journal*—which had given O'Neill their endorsement in 1956, to switch their support to Michael DiSalle for 1958. On the other hand, no major papers that endorsed DiSalle in 1956 had switched to O'Neill for 1958.¹⁸⁴

Equally criticized was O'Neill's month-before-the-election decision to plow hard and heavy into the RTW issue. His support for RTW came against the "advice of leading Republicans and some of his closest associates. As the vigor of his statements has increased, so has their unhappiness." O'Neill, many thought, was wading into a highly politicized issue that, even if by some chance did carry Ohio along with his reelection, would insure a second term filled with labor strife. Despite O'Neill's association with RTW, many of those concerned with Republican politics in Ohio were angry with the OCC for being so reckless. One Republican leader, reflecting a popular Republican sentiment that was independent of feelings on RTW, told reporters: "All this agitation is going to bring out a tremendous working class vote and whether they vote for or against the amendment they will vote for Democratic candidates."¹⁸⁵

It was that golden rule of mid-twentieth century politics that the OCC members and businessmen who pushed for RTW had failed to understand. RTW's presence in the race was

¹⁸³ Wayne Phillips, "Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over 'Right-to-Work' Issue," *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 1, 26.

¹⁸⁴ Phillips, "Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over 'Right-to-Work' Issue," *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Phillips, "Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over 'Right-to-Work' Issue," *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 26.

sure to boost turnout to near-record levels, and voter turnout was widely recognized at this time to be a detriment to the electoral success of Republicans. All it boiled down to were priorities. While the OCC and its sympathizers certainly preferred Republicans in power, their first priority in 1958 was enacting RTW. As one of these RTW proponents told the *New York Times*, 1958 was the best chance to win RTW in Ohio, due to “both the recession and the scandals in the unions.”¹⁸⁶ The Republican National Committee would have made certain that a RTW drive in 1960 was off-limits, given that such a push could spoil the presidential contest that year. The question, which remains largely unanswerable, becomes why not push for RTW in 1959, rather than 1958, in Ohio? An odd-numbered year would mean that only municipal offices would be on the ballot, turnout would likely be lower among younger people and the working class, and other issues would not interfere with RTW. The only answer to the question of why business leaders insisted on 1958 is certainly one of impatience and priorities. If the fact that 1958 was a statewide election year, and that resulted in collateral damage to the Republican Party, then so be it for the RTW proponents. Elections for statewide offices would be held again, and Republicans could come back. The time was ripe for getting RTW enacted, and it was worth breaking some eggs for business to have the unions’ political power for breakfast.

Regardless of the RTW issue, O’Neill must have surely been disappointed with what his administration had achieved. While his public statements tried to place a positive spin on his less than two years in office (effectively shortened by his illness), the actual record reflected little accomplishment. In areas where progress was being made, like the construction of highways and state facilities, a two-year gubernatorial term did not afford O’Neill the opportunity to announce the completion of any major projects. As a pre-election newspaper column explained, in addition

¹⁸⁶ Phillips, “Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over ‘Right-to-Work’ Issue,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 26.

to his “lukewarm” support from Republican Party leaders, “[O’Neill] is suffering from the effects of criticism of his administration as indecisive and lacking in administrative energy.”¹⁸⁷

As John Fenton recorded shortly afterwards, O’Neill made a poor prediction regarding RTW’s success on the ballot. Feeling that he was almost surely headed for defeat, O’Neill calculated that RTW was going to carry Ohio by a slim majority of the vote, and that by endorsing RTW he would gain the votes of those who had originally planned to vote for RTW and for Michael DiSalle for governor. If DiSalle stayed the course by remaining neutral, or opposed RTW, then O’Neill would ride the controversial ballot measure to his own narrow victory that fall.¹⁸⁸ This strategy, with all of its uncertainty, was surely a last-ditch effort. If voters had made up their mind on RTW, it was likely they had also made up their mind on the governor’s race, and it is unclear that O’Neill’s endorsement would have changed their evaluation of his gubernatorial administration.

Furthermore, no one was able to identify who these mysterious RTW *and* DiSalle supporters were. It is hard to draw up the profile of a voter who is passionately committed to RTW, but also committed to DiSalle. As Fenton later demonstrated statistically, and contemporary observers suspected, RTW supporters were mainly wealthy, upper class Ohioans, and middle class voters were either undecided or evenly split on the issue.¹⁸⁹ By attempting to mine the ranks of established RTW supporters for previously-committed DiSalle votes, O’Neill was not going to find many potential converts for his side. Those wealthy Ohioans who supported RTW were almost certainly already committed to O’Neill in the fall. In many ways, O’Neill was preaching to the choir with this strategy. O’Neill’s biggest mistake with this strategy was glaring, however. There was simply little hard evidence that RTW was going to

¹⁸⁷ Ray Dorsey, “The Right to Work,” *The Plain Dealer*, 2 November 1958, 1, 28.

¹⁸⁸ Fenton, “The Right-to-Work Vote in Ohio,” 241-243.

¹⁸⁹ Fenton, “The Right-to-Work Vote in Ohio,” 245, 247.

carry in Ohio in the fall, and while businessmen exuded confidence on the matter, predictions of RTW doom dated all the way back to Atkinson's initial introduction of RTW at the OCC meeting in October 1957.

In the weeks before the November 1958 election, O'Neill made every last ditch effort he could to salvage his career. On October 31, O'Neill took to the state's airwaves to offer a televised seven-point plan for a second term. After taking a personal swipe at Jimmy Hoffa, O'Neill laid out a plan for:

better schools; improved highways; more adequate parks, lakes, beaches, cabins, lodges, camp sites, picnic grounds, and boating facilities Provide better for those less fortunate than we are—the aged, the mentally ill, the retarded child and the needy. Keep Ohio sound financially, with a low tax burden, and make Ohio grow and develop industrially and agriculturally into the foremost state in the Union.¹⁹⁰

It was almost as if O'Neill had dusted off his campaign speeches from 1956 and delivered them as if Ohio's political economy had remained unchanged. However, such was not the case. Ohio had undergone an abrupt change, but O'Neill had not. The "rosy" picture of Ohio's postwar growth, as O'Neill himself had described it in 1956, was no longer valid just two years later. The last day of O'Neill's reelection campaign interestingly foreshadowed what was to come on Election Day. While campaigning in the small city of Springfield at a Catholic school, O'Neill's campaign was stranded due to inclement weather. As reports of the latest poll data, which showed little chance of Republican victories, were released throughout the day, O'Neill was stuck in one of Ohio's least-consequential campaign areas, unable to get his final campaign stops in more important areas of the state.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Murray Seeger, "O'Neill Sets Aims If He Wins Again," *The Plain Dealer*, 1 November 1958, 6.

¹⁹¹ "Top Four Candidates Take it Easy," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 November 1958, 4; Also, see "Poll Gives Democrats a Landslide," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 November 1958, 1.

The divisive RTW issue, much like the weather, also refused to let up. A front-page story by Wayne Phillips in the *New York Times* on the RTW battle in Ohio explained: “With barely a week to go before the election, Ohio is a divided and confused state.” RTW’s presence on the ballot, Phillips explained, had overshadowed both the contests for governor and for United States Senate. Ohio’s bout with recession had also refused to let up, and non-farm employment was down 6.8 percent (about 201,300 jobs) from the previous year.¹⁹² The fact that Ohio’s recovery from recession was coming along slower than the national recovery was no accident. It was a symptom of the structural changes in the economy that were challenging what had been a continued path of economic dominance for Ohio in the postwar period.

IX. THE LOW POINT

As the day of the election, November 4, 1958, arrived, O’Neill planned to be in Marietta to cast his ballot, as he did in every election, and then return to Columbus to watch the returns come in with his family at the governor’s mansion. After it became clear early on the night of November 4, that neither he nor RTW stood a chance, O’Neill fired off a two-sentence telegram to DiSalle: “I congratulate you upon your election as governor of Ohio. I sincerely wish for you a most successful administration for the citizens of Ohio.”¹⁹³ With his defeat, O’Neill joined a long list of one-term Republican governors. Since 1903, only one Republican, John W. Bricker, had been reelected as governor. Even Bricker, who after his three terms as governor had moved to the United States Senate, could not survive the disastrous Republican showing in 1958.¹⁹⁴

After the final votes were counted, both O’Neill and RTW had suffered miserable defeats. In record-setting fashion, RTW had gone down by what was then the largest margin of

¹⁹² Wayne Phillips, “Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over ‘Right-to-Work’ Issue,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 1.

¹⁹³ “Top Campaigners Throttle Down,” 4 November 1958, 4; “O’Neill Bows in Wire to Foe,” 5 November 1958, 1, both in *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

¹⁹⁴ “The Landslide,” Editorial, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1958, 16.

defeat for a ballot issue ever in Ohio history, while O'Neill had been defeated by the largest margin ever for an incumbent governor. After carrying only eighteen (most agricultural-based) of Ohio's eighty-eight counties, Issue Number 2 on the November ballot had only received 1,160,320 votes in support of the RTW (36.7%) versus 2,001,530 against (63.3%). The 841,210-vote difference helped insure that RTW would never entertain serious political consideration again in Ohio. In O'Neill's own home county, the reliable Republican stronghold of Washington County, RTW had lost by a vote of 8,859 against to 6,461 for.¹⁹⁵

Nearly the entire Republican slate intended by Chairman Bliss to lead to Republican dominance in Ohio through the 1960s came toppling down as well. James Rhodes was safe because the auditor's race had not been on the 1958 ballot, and Ted W. Brown remained extremely popular (and by no accident neutral on RTW) throughout the race and the rest of his twenty-eight career as Ohio's secretary of state. Beyond Rhodes and Brown, however, every partisan, statewide office was lost to the Democrats, as well as majorities in both houses of the legislature. While the Republicans had not fared well nationally, nowhere were the losses as complete as in California and Ohio, where longtime Republican stalwarts like Senate Majority Leader William Knowland and Senator John Bricker were sent into political retirement. In addition to the losses in statewide races, the Republicans had ceded three seats in the United States House of Representatives to the Democrats, yielded the largest Democratic majorities in the Ohio General Assembly in twenty years, and suffered the worst county-level "election drubbing" since 1936. Bitterness over the election results sat in immediately. In many Republican political corners, "I-told-you-so" was a popular refrain. Sensible Republicans felt that RTW had been "foisted upon them" by smaller businessmen and non-union employers who

¹⁹⁵ Anthony J. Disantis, "R-T-W Defeat is Worst Ever in Ohio," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 6 November 1958, 11.

did not understand the power wielded by organized labor, and how a recession year would lead to middle-class sympathy for union members.¹⁹⁶

One wonders whether O'Neill was relieved that the two related battles of RTW and his own reelection bid had ended. In addition to the obvious strain of his heart attack, the governor's office had been hard on him. O'Neill had never really lost at anything. Throughout his schooling, his young life, and his twenty-two-year political career in Ohio, he had simply always won. Now, for the first time since before he was old enough to vote, he faced private life. This was a theme not lost in the press. One reporter wrote, "Billy O'Neill, the fighting little gamecock of Ohio politics who had never known defeat, has finally gone down for the long count."¹⁹⁷ After some time, O'Neill accepted an offer to lecture on public affairs and political science at Bethany College in Bethany, West Virginia. O'Neill's decision to enter academia is not recorded in his archives, and his intentions are hard to discern. Perhaps he reasoned that some time away from Columbus would help mend fences with the people in the Republican Party he had angered by refusing to put a stop to the RTW push. Perhaps he thought some clear mountain air would be good for his health. Or perhaps, more cynically, he realized that a lectureship would give him a platform to air the explanations for his problems as governor and thus provide a path on which to start a political comeback. Whatever his intentions, O'Neill's sojourn as a private citizen was not something he enjoyed, and it was not long before he was ready to make another run for political office.

X. COMEBACK

By 1960, the political climate that had surrounded the twin defeats of O'Neill and RTW had changed remarkably. Michael DiSalle, much like O'Neill, was finding the governor's

¹⁹⁶ Wayne Phillips, "Labor is Dazzled by Ohio Victory," *New York Times*, 6 November 1958, 15.

¹⁹⁷ "Billy O'Neill Finally Takes Long Count," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 November 1958, 28.

offices far more demanding than he had originally thought, and organized labor was less than enamored with the performance of the governor they helped elect. DiSalle's political position was further weakened when, after being one of the first big-state governors to endorse John F. Kennedy, DiSalle failed to deliver Ohio's electoral votes for the young Catholic candidate for president. Ohio's political tide had begun to turn back to the Republican Party's favor, and the ever-resilient Bliss had come up with a plan for the state's Republican Party to resume its march to the top. James Rhodes, who had survived the Democratic onslaught in 1958 because the auditor's race was not on the ballot that November, moved to the front of the Republican line to challenge DiSalle for governor in 1962. Even O'Neill, whose political career seemed to have been put to an end by the RTW debacle in 1958, planned for a political comeback in 1960 through a bid for a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court.¹⁹⁸

The fact that Rhodes, Bliss, and O'Neill were all able to make such rapid and remarkable comebacks says a lot about the RTW issue in Ohio. Surely John Bricker, who felt that he had been sent into retirement just a bit too soon because he was foolishly dragged into the RTW fight by O'Neill, would have never predicted that O'Neill would be sent back to statewide office by Ohio voters just two years later. The Republican revival—and even more so, O'Neill's—offers compelling evidence that RTW was *not* identified in the minds of Ohio voters with specific politicians, unlike California. RTW in Ohio was not perceived as an “O'Neill issue,” or a “Bricker issue.” RTW was understood to be the result of the efforts of self-serving business groups and far-right political instigators. While O'Neill might have been guilty by association with these groups in 1958, his public image had not been permanently tarnished. In fact, while his 1958 defeat might have reflected the judgment of voters concerning O'Neill's ability to

¹⁹⁸ Curtin and Bell, *Ohio Politics Almanac*, 56-57.

manage the state as governor, the public was clearly not unhappy with O'Neill's character, or hesitant about his potential to serve Ohio in a different office.

In 1960, the two-year Democratic control of the General Assembly ended as Republicans regained their majorities in both houses of the legislature. The state's voters also sent the National Democratic Party a message by preferring Richard M. Nixon over John F. Kennedy for president. Lest there be any doubt about the Republican trend in Ohio as the 1960s got underway, voters in 1962 sent Republican James A. Rhodes into office as Ohio's sixty-first governor. He, Ray Bliss, and the Ohio Republican Party were by then back in the driver's seat of Ohio's political system.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

Just as O'Neill's policy proposals for a second term reflected an inadequate understanding of the structural problems gripping Ohio, so too did his reasoning on the RTW debate. Even before the election, sensible observers realized that the "strongest support for [RTW] was found among small business men, farmers, and nonunion workers."¹⁹⁹ While these bases of support were what O'Neill was accustomed to in the Washington County elections of his past, they were not reflective of Ohio's present centers of political power. Ohio was becoming less and less an agricultural state dominated by places like Marietta, where nonunion businessmen dealt with farmers and other small businessmen out of Main Street offices and storefronts. Instead, Ohio had reached its height as a large industrial state, defined by the "Eight that Made Ohio Great"—the eight cities of more than 100,000 people—where industrial

¹⁹⁹ Phillips, "Survey Finds Ohio Divided Over 'Right-to-Work' Issue," *New York Times*, 29 October 1958, 26.

unionism was at its strongest, and an economy dominated by agriculture and small business was increasingly becoming a distant memory.²⁰⁰

One may wonder why O'Neill's failure to understand the manner in which Ohio had changed had not prevented him from political success before 1958. As a state legislator, O'Neill had represented his hometown of Marietta and Washington County, which was far removed from the hundred years of change that had transformed Ohio. As Attorney General, O'Neill had served in a less-public role, and in an office where a solid grip of Ohio's political economy was not a requirement for success. O'Neill the Attorney General was an attorney and law enforcement officer, and he was well-suited for those tasks, just as he was equally well-suited for his later role as a member of the Ohio Supreme Court. It was as governor of a dynamic and complex state where O'Neill struggled. Ohio, quite simply, needed its first industrial, business-minded governor, and O'Neill, with his complete lack of practical business experience, did not fit the bill. During the fall of 1958, while he continued to fight a rearguard action without a solid understanding of his surroundings, C. William O'Neill increasingly sounded like a latter-day Hebert Hoover. O'Neill's pie-in-the-sky economic message of two years earlier only served to complete the parallel. The era of 1950s politicians who could continue along without an adequate understanding of economic and social pressures was coming to a close. The postwar system was "under stress," and it would take a new cast of characters with different backgrounds, such as Ray Bliss and James Rhodes, to succeed in a new political environment.²⁰¹

Just like O'Neill demanded in his 1956 campaign speeches, more pragmatic men like Bliss and Rhodes could deliver action over more words. It is likely that a more business-minded

²⁰⁰ The "Eight that Made Ohio Great" were (with county populations in 1950): Cleveland (1,389,532), Cincinnati (723,952), Columbus (503,410), Akron (410,032), Dayton (398,441), Toledo (395,551), Canton (283,194), and Youngstown (257,629).

²⁰¹ Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg*, 154-187.

politician with a wider range of real-world experiences would have avoided the lofty economic predictions that O'Neill eagerly offered up to the electorate in the 1956 campaign, understood the dangerous axe that organized labor could wield, and would have acted with more decisiveness when faced with times of trouble. One tends to think of a caricature of the business-oriented man of the 1950s as "out of touch" with ordinary working people. But if nothing else, O'Neill's performance during the RTW debacle demonstrated that it was in fact he who was "out of touch." Despite his Southeastern Ohio background, O'Neill's political stardom had left him insulated from the real concerns of ordinary voters.

In the end, perhaps nothing could have saved C. William O'Neill's from his political fate in 1958. Like many stars that burn too quickly, he was predisposed to burn out prematurely. Perhaps his candidacy and his ascent to the pinnacle of Ohio's political power were all too perfect. After all, it was the *unlikely* men, such as Lausche, Rhodes, and Riffe, who eventually left the largest impact on Ohio. O'Neill probably felt that he had fallen victim to a perfect storm of unfortunate circumstances—RTW, the 1958 recession, his ill health, and the two-year term—but, as he told the *Columbus Dispatch* in 1975, he really did not enjoy being governor. As a chief executive, the perfectionist, workaholic side of O'Neill was terribly destructive. Had he enjoyed the benefit of the first four-year term, he may not have lived to complete it. No matter how long of hours he worked, O'Neill could not conquer the obstacles that faced Ohio.



Without the blunder-ridden defeats suffered by the Ohio Republican Party, the political climate of the ensuing years would have surely been different. If O'Neill had remained as governor, there would have been no Michael DiSalle to provide John F. Kennedy with a jumpstart for his presidential run in 1960. The election had more than a hypothetical impact on a

future presidential race. In fact, the 1958 election produced a real political shift in Washington. In some ways, 1958 marks the beginning of the breakup of the “Fifties system,” and the beginning of the 1960s. The 1958 midterm Congressional election helped propel Senator John F. Kennedy towards a presidential run with a record margin in his reelection bid, and introduced Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia to the Senate, who remains there to this day. Just like the midterm Congressional elections in 1994, the 1958 election was widely recognized as a shock to the political landscape that brought a new set of characters onto the scene. Just as the 1958 election introduced important players to the political stage, a similar result occurred in Ohio. Vernal G. Riffe, who would go on to serve a record twenty years as Speaker of the Ohio House, was elected to his first of eighteen consecutive terms in the Ohio House in 1958.²⁰² The upstart and under-funded United States Senate campaign of Stephen M. Young, which used the high-turnout of the Right-to-Work battle to defeat incumbent John Bricker, employed a young Cleveland attorney and parking-lot owner named Howard M. Metzenbaum as campaign manager. Metzenbaum himself later had a twenty-year career in the United States Senate.²⁰³

In Ohio politics, specifically, the 1958 election also had a monumental impact. It is likely that if James A. Rhodes had not been the only statewide Republican standing after the 1958 debacle, he would have not been the first Republican in line to run for governor in 1962. Had Rhodes not received the opportunity to challenge DiSalle in 1962, would he have still become the longest-serving governor in Ohio’s history? Other questions for Ohio politics abound. Would the Republican dominance of the 1960s in Ohio been possible if the Republicans would have had to clean up the fiscal mess that the state found itself in at the end of the 1950s? That task instead fell to Michael V. DiSalle, who thereafter became labeled as “Tax-Hike Mike”

²⁰² “Highlights of Riffe’s Career,” *The Plain Dealer*, 1 August 1997, 8A.

²⁰³ “From Here to Obscurity: Underachievers Give Ohio a Checkered History of Power in Congress,” *The Plain Dealer*, 30 October 1994, 1C.

by his political opponents. These questions are impossible to answer, but they demonstrate the importance of the 1958 election to Ohio's political development in the years that followed.

The 1958 election was undoubtedly the high point of labor union political success in Ohio. The Ohio AFL and Ohio CIO had not even merged until just before the RTW battle, and the ballot fight over SUBs in 1955 had been an utter disaster for organized labor. Alas, the bickering over the history of RTW was just a symptom of larger union infighting that continues to this day. After paying off its outstanding obligations, UOLO's last significant act was to hire a certified public accountant to close out the books and produce a final report. Having defeated its Goliath by an overwhelming majority of votes, Ohio labor's most effective political entity simply turned off the lights, shut the doors, and went home.²⁰⁴ COPE was still existent, but without an impending disaster like RTW on the horizon, unions were content to handle their own, narrow affairs. Perhaps the overwhelming margin by which RTW was defeated actually produced a negative outcome for labor. After all, RTW's resounding defeat insured that the issue would have no life in Ohio politics again.

What O'Neill's time as governor proved, if anything, was that this incredibly bright, dedicated, career public servant just did not adequately understand the changes that were engulfing both Ohio and the nation. In 1956, O'Neill's gubernatorial announcement speech cautioned that self-serving lobbying by special interests could lead Ohio down a dangerous road. O'Neill explained that "our efforts shall always be dedicated to seeing that no person, businessman, labor leader, lobbyist for special interests or politician is ever permitted to usurp such governmental power ... and exploit it for personal advantage."²⁰⁵ Whether it was the result

²⁰⁴ UOLO Expense Report, 1 April 1958-18 February 1959, Louis G. Bernstein, CPA, OH-AFLCIO, OHS, MSS 252, Box 13, Folder 21, "Uniform Mailings, 1958."

²⁰⁵ "Remarks of C. William O'Neill for Release," 14 February 1956, CWOP, OHS, MSS 343, Box 36, "Governor's Correspondence, 1956-1958, Illness Letters and Press Releases," 4.

of his heart attack, the poor judgment of the ambitious young men with which he surrounded himself, or his own personal inability to put his fist down, O'Neill had let those individuals who were pursuing RTW for personal gain take advantage of his political name. O'Neill bet the fortunes of his political career on a risky proposition introduced by individuals who were not versed in the art of politics. For the first time in his twenty-year political career, O'Neill had placed his fate in the hands of forces outside his own control. When the RTW supporters came calling, O'Neill "melted," and with that so too did his spotless political career.

Fortunately for O'Neill, his career was not ended by the RTW debacle like many other prominent figures, including Ohio's own John Bricker and United States Senate Majority Leader William Knowland of California. By 1960, Ohioans were ready to forgive O'Neill's mistakes as governor, and he settled into a role to which he was much more accustomed. While he certainly must have wondered after the 1958 election what his political career might have been like without RTW, he had the benefit of another career to occupy his time. O'Neill settled in well to the Ohio Supreme Court, where the slower pace was probably easier on his heart, and a fine relationship with the press was not required.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, August 20, 1978, the sixty-two-year-old chief justice suffered a heart attack at his Upper Arlington home. After being transported to the nearby Ohio State University Medical Center, he died at 12:30 PM. O'Neill's death was a shock. The day before his death, the ever-campaigning O'Neill had gone down to Chillicothe, Ohio in 96-degree heat to participate in the 170th Anniversary Celebration of the Chillicothe Masons. Newspaper reports explained that during his visit to Chillicothe, "O'Neill appeared in

fine health, shaking hands and talking with many of the hundreds of persons in the audience.... As was his style, O'Neill kept the Chillicothe audiences attention throughout the address."²⁰⁶

Just one month before his death, on July 15, O'Neill took part in another Mason ceremony. His hometown chapter in Marietta presented O'Neill with the first-ever Rufus Putnam Distinguished Service Award, named for "Gen. Rufus Putnam, who helped found Marietta and was the first grand master of Ohio masons."²⁰⁷ O'Neill had, without a doubt, become the most prominent product of Marietta in his time. His obituary, which led the front page of the *Columbus Dispatch* the day after his death, referred to O'Neill as the Republican "golden boy" of Ohio politics. When he died in office in 1978, O'Neill still had only one defeat to his name in the course of career that began with his election to the Ohio House in 1938.

While on the Court, O'Neill led the effort to modernize the Ohio judiciary, and he was widely celebrated as a natural leader and accomplished reformer. Part of O'Neill's modernization effort was a new facility for Ohio's highest tribunal. In 1974, Chief Justice O'Neill moved the Court out of the Statehouse and into the recently-completed state office tower across the street. The new office building, which was later named for James A. Rhodes, towered over the state capital as the largest skyscraper in Columbus.

After serving ten years on the Supreme Court, O'Neill had suffered a second heart attack in 1970. That same year he had been appointed Chief Justice by Governor James A. Rhodes to replace the late Kingsley A. Taft.²⁰⁸ Although the pace for members of the Court was slower than in other branches of state government, O'Neill had refused to slow down. In an editorial tribute to O'Neill, the *Columbus Dispatch* remarked: "Chief Justice O'Neill was a worker and, while he watched his weight and walked for exercise, he sought no relief in handling the daily

²⁰⁶ Robert Ruth, "Justice O'Neill Dies at Age 62," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, 1.

²⁰⁷ Ruth, "Justice O'Neill Dies," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, 1.

²⁰⁸ "O'Neill Sworn in as Chief Justice," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 4 April 1970, 5.

chores of the state's top judicial post."²⁰⁹ His government service constantly took him around the state to speak, receive plaques, and shake hands with Ohio citizens. Until the Supreme Court recently vacated the Rhodes Tower for more comfortable surroundings in a different building, three large cases of memorabilia collected by O'Neill occupied a wall in the Court's law library. O'Neill had been recognized, awarded, and celebrated by a wide assortment of legal, law enforcement, and community groups. Regardless of how Ohioans evaluated his time as governor, the consensus was that O'Neill was an excellent jurist. Always the leader, O'Neill was the head of the National Association of State Supreme Court Chief Justices at the time of his death.²¹⁰

In 2003, a small Ohio Bicentennial marker was placed in Marietta to mark O'Neill's life. Evenly situated between Marietta College and the cemetery where O'Neill was laid to rest, it is regrettably one of the only existing public testaments to O'Neill's meritorious service to Ohio. Unlike other longtime politicians, whose names adorn state office buildings, university halls, and recreational facilities, O'Neill's name has largely been forgotten by the public.

On August 22, O'Neill was laid to rest as part of a private burial service at Oak Grove Cemetery in Marietta.²¹¹ Among the graves of Marietta founders and former Ohio Governor George White, one can find the final resting place of the only person in Ohio's history to serve at the head of all three branches of state government. Although O'Neill had lived virtually his entire adult life in Columbus, and his wife Betty continued to reside there, he was buried at home in Marietta, which had changed little since he first left it for the state capital before World War II. Oak Grove Cemetery sits just around a bend in the hilly terrain from O'Neill's boyhood home, and is only a few blocks removed from the picturesque brick campus of Marietta College,

²⁰⁹ "Chief Justice O'Neill," Editorial, *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, B2.

²¹⁰ "Chief Justice O'Neill," Editorial, *The Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 1978, B2.

²¹¹ "Burial Service for Chief Justice O'Neill," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 23 August 1978, A2.

where O'Neill first set forth on his political career. The hills that roll through the cemetery offer breathtaking glimpses of the Ohio River Valley, and despite its location amidst the brick streets and busy downtown of Marietta, the cemetery is amazingly peaceful. After contemplating this quiet and powerfully beautiful scene, one can understand why such a location was the fitting resting place for a man who in his public life never remained still.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscript Collections

Baker, Charles, *Papers 1958-1959*, Walter P. Reuther Library (WPRL) of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

DiSalle, Michael V., *Papers 1928-1974*, MSS 344, Ohio Historical Society (OHS), Columbus.

O'Neill, C. William, *Papers 1947-1959*, MSS 343, Ohio Historical Society (OHS), Columbus.

Ohio AFL-CIO, *Records 1922-1977*, MSS 252, Ohio Historical Society (OHS), Columbus.

Pollock, Samuel, *Papers 1927-1958*, Walter P. Reuther Library (WPRL) of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

UAW, *Records 1941-1985*, Walter P. Reuther Library (WPRL) of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

Newspapers, Selected Articles

The New York Times

The Columbus Dispatch

Columbus C.I.O. News, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus

The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer

Legislative Digest & Review (Columbus, Ohio)

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Totton J. "The 1958 Election in California." *Western Political Science Quarterly* 12, no. 1, Part 2 (March 1959): 276-300.

Boryczka, Raymond and Lorin Lee Cary. *No Strength Without Union: An Illustrated History of Ohio Workers 1803-1980*. Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1982.

Boyle, Kevin, ed. *Organized Labor and American Politics, 1894-1994: The Labor-Liberal Alliance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Curtin, Michael F. and Julia Barry Bell. *The Ohio Politics Almanac*. Kent, OH: Kent State, 1996.

Davies, Richard O. *Defender of the Old Guard: John Bricker and American Politics*. Columbus: Ohio State, 1993.

- Draper, Allen. *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967*. New York: Praeger, 1989.
- Fenton, John H. "The Right-to-Work Vote in Ohio." *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 3 (August 1959): 241-253.
- Fraser, Steve and Gary Gerstle. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Gall, Gilbert J. *The Politics of Right to Work: The Labor Federations as Special Interests: 1943-1979*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Gould, Lewis L. *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans*. New York: Random House, 2003.
- Hissong, Clyde, ed. *Ohio Lives: The Buckeyes State Biographical Record*. Hopkinsville, KY: Historical Record Association, 1968.
- Jacoby, Sanford M. *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Knepper, George W. *Ohio and Its People*, 2nd ed. Kent, OH: Kent State, 1997.
- Lamis, Alexander P., and Mary Anne Sharkey. eds. *Ohio Politics*. Kent, OH: Kent State, 1994.
- Larson, Arthur. *A Republican Looks at His Party*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.
- Mayer, George H. *The Republican Party, 1854-1966*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford, 1967.
- Montgomery, Gayle B., and James W. Johnson. Collaboration with Paul G. Manolis. *One Step from the White House: The Rise and Fall of Senator William F. Knowland*. Berkeley: University of California, 1998.
- Ohio Historical Society. *The Governors of Ohio*. 2nd ed. Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1969.
- Pach, Chester J., Jr., and Elmo Richardson. *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1991.
- Parmet, Herbert S. *Eisenhower and the American Crusades*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- Patterson, James T. *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

- Reinhard, David W. *The Republican Right Since 1945*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983.
- Saxbe, William B. and Peter D. Franklin. *I've Seen the Elephant: An Autobiography*. Kent, OH: Kent State, 2000.
- Stebenne, David L. *Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal*. New York: Oxford, 1996.
- Van Tine, Warren, et al. *In the Worker's Interest: A History of the Ohio AFL-CIO, 1958-1998*. Columbus: Center for Labor Research, 1998.
- Van Tine, Warren, and Michael Pierce, eds. *Builders of Ohio: A Biographical History*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 2003.
- Young, Stephen M. *Tales Out of Congress*. Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1964.
- Zieger, Robert H. and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2002.
- Zimmerman, Richard G. *Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael V. DiSalle*. Kent, OH: Kent State, 2004.