

INTERVIEW XXV

DATE: March 17, 1988

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Califano's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Subversive Activities Control Board.

C: The decisions of the Supreme Court and changing times, of course, began to erode the power of the Subversive Activities Control Board, which had been created I guess during the [Joseph] McCarthy era. Senator [Everett] Dirksen was a big proponent of the board, in good part because he had--partly because he believed in it and partly because in 1966 the President put on a nominee he very much wanted to put on the board. Now, what the President got for that I don't know but typically in his work with Dirksen, I see here in the memo to [John] Macy, "We respect everything of Dirksen." When the President decided to go with Dirksen's appointment, he put an admonition to Macy, "But don't discuss with anyone yet. I want to see Dirksen." This is June of 1966. We'd have to see what was going on at that time. I'm sure it was related to whatever--

G: You think he would use it in horse-trading for someone?

C: Absolutely. There was no question about it. He always told us--I mean he told me and I'm sure he told the others--that when Dirksen called, Dirksen wanted something, we'd give it to him, or if it was really important, make sure the President knew about it. I mean

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he was the minority leader. In that Congress, we had a liberal majority in the House; we did not have a liberal majority in the Senate without the Republicans. We did in the House. And that made it necessary to keep the moderate Republicans aboard because the southern Democrats still voted very much as a bloc and very much against most of our programs. So we had to have the Dirksens and [Jacob] Javits of the world with us in order to get our legislation passed.

G: Did he give Dirksen a seat on every board and regulatory agency?

C: No, I don't think so. But I'm sure if there was anybody Dirksen really wanted on a particular board for the Republican seat he was certainly able to do that. Also on the Board--and I guess he was on by that point in time--the chairman of the board [was] John Mahan. Was it?

G: M-A-H-A-N.

C: Mahan was [Mike] Mansfield's guy. So I think knowing he had a board set up like that when he decided to do something for Simon McHugh, then-husband of his secretary, Vicki--was it McCammon McHugh?

G: Yes.

C: From sitting where the President was sitting it was the perfect kind of thing to do to him because he had the protection of the majority and minority leaders of the Senate having two of their very close aides sitting on the board. I have no recollection of being consulted about putting Simon McHugh on the board and I doubt that he did consult me. It's the kind of thing I don't think he talked to anybody about except McHugh, I'm sure Vicki, and maybe Marvin [Watson].

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When he put the name forward, all hell broke loose. In no time at all, all hell broke loose. It brought very much into play the lack of any business with the Subversive Activities Control Board to beat. The W. [E. B.] Dubois case was wending its way through the courts from the district court, and the court of appeals had held [up] most of what the Subversive Activities Control Board had done, namely finding that somebody was a Communist and designating them a Communist, to be unconstitutional, leaving them with very little power.

That decision unfortunately as I recall rolled out of the courts at around the same time that the McHugh thing--McHugh had either been confirmed--we finally got him confirmed, unanimously incidentally, despite threats of filibusters and what have you. I have no idea what it took to do that but I'm sure it took something. But right around the time he goes to work on the board for what was then--the press was calling it a thirty thousand dollar Senate cure for a secretary's wife. And this secretary, as you know, was a very pretty, voluptuous woman and so it was a hell of a--there was an underground story as well as an overground story. When I got mostly involved in it was the President was determined to find something for the board to do and he was determined to get into this thing himself. And I spent most of my time urging him to stay the hell out of it; take cover. Finally, we came up with--and Mahan was not [a] particularly effective, qualified guy. He was really a second-rater so there was a very heated hearing in the House of Representatives on their appropriation. He was a disaster at the hearing but even so [John James] Rooney who was a really aggressive anti-Communist put enough money in to keep them going, maybe even increased the appropriation.

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A terrific movement began in the Senate to kill the Subversive Activities Control Board. And this was where Johnson was so smart in terms of his strength. He had the majority and the minority leader with pets on the board, so they became the people that moved and ultimately moved an amendment, but gave the board a year of life until the end of 1968 to continue and find something to do. They literally had no cases pending. Ramsey Clark, who had become the attorney general, didn't want to give him any cases. I don't know how many conversations I had with both the President and Clark on this subject, and Dirksen, on the issue of giving them work to do. Dirksen felt enormously embarrassed because he said there was (inaudible). He said they were scoring in the debate on extending the life of the Board. He had talked about how many cases were in the Justice Department just about to be sent to the Subversive Activities Control Board-- something, incidentally, it wouldn't surprise me that Johnson had told him and it may not have been untrue in the sense that there may have been a lot of paperwork. You know, there's a unit in the Justice Department that deals with internal security and they may have had a hundred names of people they were thinking of sending over to get designated.

G: But Clark was not sympathetic, or--?

C: Clark was very much opposed to sending any cases over as a matter of principle. To Ramsey a lot of things were a matter of principle. This may have been a legitimate principle. The President at the same time set me about finding other things for the board to do and on issues whether to turn it into a research agency or this or that. That created a lot of turmoil in the White House staff. I mean just looking for something to do. [Harry] McPherson saying that even though there may be legitimate functions, the five guys that were sitting there were certainly not capable of performing them. My own staff, [Larry]

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Levinson, [James] Gaither, what have you, thinking we were off on a wild goose hunt and shouldn't do anything. I argued repeatedly with the President about it. He was unmovable.

G: What was his posture? Would he--?

C: His posture was that, you know, there was a board there. Congress had put the board in place. There was an internal security threat. They did perform a function. By god he wanted work for them. While he had Mansfield and Dirksen hanging out there, what I guess began to sting him was they weren't out there as egregiously if you will as he was out there. While their guys were probably no more competent or incompetent than McHugh, it wasn't the President's secretary, which is something different about it when it's the President's secretary's husband. In any case, eventually we got Ramsey to send some cases over there and--

G: How was Clark--?

C: I just can't--Clark just said--look, we all thought--I mean the President knew, I thought, the board ought to die. Clark thought the board ought to die. I don't think there's anybody on the White House staff with the possible exception of Marvin Watson that thought--maybe Mike Manatos--thought the Subversive Activities Control Board should continue.

G: Well, were you ever present in discussions between LBJ and Clark about sending cases over? Did they ever talk directly about it in your presence?

C: No. But I talked to each of them about it.

G: Well, what does that tell you--?

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- C: I don't know what he said to Ramsey, if anything. It's conceivable he never talked directly to Ramsey.
- G: What does this episode say about the relationship between the President and a cabinet officer in terms of--?
- C: Ramsey was a very difficult cabinet officer. Partly because almost everything was an issue of principle to him. In the Safe Streets Act for example--what became the Safe Streets and Crime Control Act in 1968--when we sent that bill up Ramsey made the issue of the title of the bill a matter of principle. I had given it the title Safe Streets, thought that was a great title. That was what people cared about, they were worried about. He was very disturbed and indeed took the issue all the way to the President, who--
- G: What was wrong with Safe Streets?
- C: Well, we were promising more than we could deliver. We couldn't make streets safe and therefore--if that was standard for how you titled stuff or sell stuff on the Hill--
- G: Truth in advertising.
- C: --we never would have sold anything. But Ramsey, so he'd make that thing an issue. He was very sticky on everything. Johnson made a terrible mistake with Ramsey at one point early on. I don't remember the issue. Maybe as we go through this stuff I will. There was a point at which he had a very strong dispute with Ramsey and he called Ramsey's father, Tom Clark, the Supreme Court justice, and asked him to talk to his son. And it was [a] rare example to me of LBJ making a mistake on which button to push. It was exactly for whatever reasons the wrong button to push. I never subsequently, even on occasions when there [were] situations where I could have personally gotten somebody's

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father or mother to talk to them when I was trying to get them to do something, ever did it because Ramsey reacted very, very adversely.

G: Is that right?

C: Yes.

G: How did Tom Clark react to it?

C: I don't remember. And he obviously did it, or tried to do it.

G: Had Clark resigned?

C: What's interesting about Ramsey in all the manifestations of it is--and we'll get a lot of examples of this, but I mean--Ramsey basically--Johnson used to say that there are two jobs in the government you want to give to your mother. And one is the commissioner of internal revenue and one is the attorney general's job. Those are jobs you don't even trust you wife or your children with, only your mother. While he made [Nicholas] Katzenbach attorney general, I think he was never able to realize or feel that he had 100 per cent of Nick. He always had that lingering concern because Nick had been the assistant attorney general for the Office of Legal Counsel for Bobby Kennedy and then became deputy attorney general when [Byron] White went to the Supreme Court.

G: Clark had been under Robert Kennedy also?

C: But Clark was the Land's Division. He was a Texan and he was Tom Clark's son.

Breeding in its own way was important to Johnson in that sense. When he ultimately decided to make Nick attorney general--and somewhere I noticed, I've seen the Daily Diary when he had him up to Camp David to give him the last blood test--the question of who was going to be the deputy came up. I never talked to Nick about it but I would doubt greatly that Nick picked Ramsey in the first instance. The President had Ramsey

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over at the White House for a while doing--I remember at one point closing VA [Veterans Administration] hospitals, something that aborted if I recall correctly. Johnson would bring somebody over like that, or Harry McPherson, for a month, kind of just kind of swallow them into the staff and then make his decision. McPherson promptly became counsel. Ramsey sort of went back. Then when Nick left, when he moved Nick to State [Department] to replace George Ball, I think he thought he was getting in Ramsey somebody who would be a more knee-jerk loyal Texan than he got. Not only was Ramsey not knee-jerk loyal--I don't mean that he was disloyal but he really did things that--the filing of the IBM case and the newspaper case on January 19, 1969, cases he knew he never could have gotten clear to file during the administration, that kind of thing. So it became a difficult relationship.

G: But it does show, doesn't it, a degree of detachment and LBJ allowing cabinet officers to run their own shops?

C: Well, he allowed people to run their own shops on things--in no way the way a President [Ronald] Reagan or even a President [Jimmy] Carter allowed people to run their own shops. These people were operating within well-defined policy lines. My hunch is he was stuck with Ramsey. Ramsey wasn't incompetent. He was smart. He was tough. He just would constantly turn these issues into issues of principle. I mean, I don't mind issues of principle. There are plenty of them. I had plenty of them; everybody does. But I mean not the title of an act or . . . .

G: Was he politically insensitive?

C: He wasn't politically insensitive, but he was--he knew the political implications of things he was doing, but he was so skeptical about--"skeptical" is the wrong word. He thought



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many, many things were so clearly right or wrong that he was intolerant of the grey areas that really pervade one government decision upon another.

G: Did LBJ in retrospect feel that Clark was a mistake as attorney general, that it was one of his biggest mistakes in naming him attorney general?

C: I can't answer that question. I think he was certainly not as happy with Ramsey as he had expected to be. I don't think Ramsey turned out the way he thought he would turn out. The reason I pause on that is, contrary to most people's impression, Johnson was not averse to appointing a guy he thought might be more liberal than he was or somebody that might be more conservative than he was or hold a different view. He was smart, intellectually very smart and he was also smart enough to know that that kind of conflict and disagreement even with him made for better decisions often. What he did want was loyalty in the crunch and loyalty always to him. Any president wants that. He wasn't peculiar in that desire. And I think it's in that area that, for example, I think he and Bill Moyers ultimately split, whatever tore that relationship. And I think it's in that area that there were occasions when he worried about Ramsey Clark.

G: Clark has been described as unique in that he did retain close ties with Robert Kennedy and he was someone who, like John Douglas in Justice Department, who was sort of an avenue between the two men.

C: Well, Douglas--I don't think Clark retained close relationships with Kennedy in the way that a John Douglas did. I don't think they're comparable. Douglas was very much a leg man for Kennedy. He just was, Bobby Kennedy, he was and is today as we sit here today the major person in his life, and is very adoring. I don't mean that in a bad way but just (inaudible) Bobby Kennedy. Ramsey would be with Bobby Kennedy in the sense that

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there were issues which Bobby Kennedy believed in, or spoke about, and said he believed in, that Ramsey felt were overarching issues of principle and therefore he was with him on that. Bobby Kennedy was not hard to get along with. He wasn't hard to get along with for me, nor was Teddy [Kennedy]. I had plenty of lines into them but it was his fantastic ambition that was in constant clash with Johnson and obviously he deeply resented, as is quite human, his brother getting assassinated, and he deeply resented that Johnson was in [the] White House. Remember, you're talking about somebody that Johnson was convinced had bugged him and probably had, as recent events have indicated, bugged him when he was vice president, who didn't want him to be vice president, literally went down to see him and probably wasn't straight with him about what his brother thought, tried to get him to reject something he was about to be offered or preclude the offer from coming as soon as he saw it was coming. So you're dealing with a situation in which Johnson's got to say, "I can't trust this guy." And this guy's got to say, "I can't stand this guy." Kennedy's got to say, "I can't stand him." It was never destined to be an easy relationship. And remember the Kennedys very much had an attitude that the presidency was sort of theirs and this intruder had come in for a few years because Jack had been shot but it was really an inheritance. Bobby would inherit it and then Teddy would inherit it. There was a great sense of that.

G: A birthright.

C: Yes, absolutely.

G: Did Johnson have any hard evidence about being bugged?

C: By Bobby?

G: Yes.

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C: No, but he thought he was. He talked about it. I have no idea whether he had hard evidence or not, but he certainly talked about it. Someday history will answer that I guess. And he talked about Bobby just bugging him. We do know that Bobby bugged [Martin Luther] King extensively.

G: You had mentioned before this senator from New Hampshire who LBJ managed to arrange a *quid pro quo* so that the Senator wouldn't have to testify on a milk subsidy. This guy would support him on--was it [Thomas] McIntyre?

C: Support him on the--was it on the Subversive Activities Control Board?

G: Right. I think--

C: Is that in these papers? Classic effort, we got all the patriotic groups, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and all that, all the former members of the Subversive Activities Control Board to chime in.

(Interruption)

G: But any other memory of that New England senator that--?

C: No, but it's somewhere in this. You know, there's something really big missing here. January 1967, this goes from April 7 to July 27. Somewhere, let's just note that. Okay? I don't have July 21 here. But there's something missing; there's a lot missing. You can see where it splits. Somewhere someone's got a lot of those pages out of there. God, I had lunch with [Hubert] Humphrey that day, and the night before I had the big dinner in New York at the Century Association on the legislative program for 1968.

G: Was this at all tied in to his feeling about communist subversion and the anti-war movement?

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C: No. I mean I have no recollection of that or any sense of that. It was sort of a bolt out of the blue. The Simon McHugh thing blew up the whole Subversive Activities Control Board and we had a wild couple of days in which we tried to figure out something for it to do and pick up the pieces. It was all damage control.

G: Was he disturbed by it, LBJ, or did he seem to feel it something that could be contained?

C: I don't mean to sound jaded, but it was obviously a situation in which I'm sure he was disturbed but I don't think--and it obviously consumed him for that day when you look at the fact that he met with McHugh; he met with Dirksen; he met with Vicki and the two of them. He met with Mahan. He must have called me half a dozen times on his book there. It was obviously--this was the major item for that day. It wasn't the only thing that happened that day if you look just at my own schedule. We had a Quadriad meeting. I don't know why I had lunch with Humphrey. We must have had something going. I was seeing [Lane] Kirkland who was then the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] lobbyist for [George] Meany's . . . . We must have had something going on in the economy because I had these meetings on the twenty-first and then on the twenty-fourth [of July].

(Interruption)

My first involvement with the supersonic transport was working for Secretary [Robert] McNamara. He called me in--it was set up in April. He called me sometime in March of 1964 and said that the President was going to form an advisory committee on the supersonic transport. He gave me a draft of the executive order and asked me to take a look at it and he wanted me to be the executive director of it, that we would form two

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teams in the Pentagon, a team for it and a team against it, a blue and a red team, and we would estimate the system's cost and take a hard look at it.

G: Was that a characteristic Pentagon study approach?

C: Well, these were big dollars we're talking about. Yes, sometimes we'd do that with very big projects and we needed a lot of computer time and systems analysis. You know it wasn't like today where everybody would think of doing computers and stuff like that. I'm sure the President dumped it there because he had concerns about it. I don't know. Formed the committee. It had whatever the executive order says as members plus Gene Black, who had been president of the World Bank, and Stanley de Jongh [Osborne] who was the chairman of Olin Mathieson [Chemical Corporation]. I can't remember why he was picked, but it was for financial expertise I'm sure. Stanley de J. Osborne. O-S-B-O-R-N-E. Chairman of Olin Mathieson. And [Najeeb] Halaby was then the head of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration].

McNamara had grave reservations about the SST [supersonic transport], grave reservations about the government putting any money into it. The reason the government money became an issue was that every major commercial aviation development in this country, including the jumbo jets which we have today, really sprang out of the military aviation technology. So we were paying all the jet aircraft--and the C-5A really gave birth to the jumbo jets. You wouldn't have jumbo jets today if there hadn't been a C-5A. This was beyond what military technology needed. We didn't need a supersonic transport plane, and we weren't developing one. So that the question was--France and England were at that point I think independently each developing one. I can't give it to you in any depth but in relatively short order it became--and by that I mean I think before I left the

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Pentagon, which was mid-1965--it became clear to me and more importantly clear to Secretary McNamara that, one, there was no military need for supersonic transport. In this stage of development we were talking about engine and airframe systems of the next generation, beyond what we needed for fighters, so it was big bucks. That, number one, and number two, as we projected what would happen in the next cycle--and we're talking about we used to run these projections twenty five years of aviation. When we looked at the C-5A and the economics of that when it became a jumbo jet, we found that an SST was not economically viable and operating it couldn't function without subsidies. Halaby didn't agree and in our report he dissented. I mean I remember that.

G: Were the other members of the--?

C: I think they were all--we brought them all aboard. One of the things I remember vividly about the meeting was McNamara's conference room is an enormous room, sort of football-field size, and he would not allow anyone to sit at the table except the members of the committee and me. Any staff members that were there had to sit in chairs that were against the wall so that if somebody wanted to talk to Halaby it was a very ostentatious thing. He had to get up, couldn't reach Halaby's hand to hand him a note. He had to literally get up. This was deliberate on McNamara's part. Get up and walk three or four steps to give Halaby a note or whisper in his ear. Since McNamara and I were the most prepared people for those meetings, we obviously had a tremendous advantage. Also nobody was able to speak; no staff member could speak. Only the members of the committee and the executive director, which was me, were allowed to speak.

We sort of went to the next phases. I notice when I went to the White House that the President--the President kept it alive, I'm sure, because of [Warren] Magnuson and

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[Henry "Scoop"] Jackson, two very powerful senators in the state of Wisconsin [Washington]. Magnuson was chairman of the Commerce Committee, which was the committee in which we had a tremendous amount of our consumer legislation: truth-in-packaging, the automobile legislation, highway safety, auto safety, maybe even the Highway Beautification bill, I can't remember. But he was very important. He was also important on the appropriations because I think for years he chaired the appropriations subcommittee for HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare], which was where a tremendous amount of our Great Society programs were getting funded. Jackson was a, while not chairman of the Armed Services Committee, was a very influential player in the Armed Services Committee and very important. He had done in the late fifties as a subcommittee chairman a series of hearings that really resulted in amending the National Security Act. He was very influential, very thoughtful defense, national security, policy player.

Eventually though, with McNamara saying, one, no defense need for this; two, we don't think it's going to be economically viable, [there was] more and more pressure to wind this thing down and roll it out. As I recall in the last round at which they finally got clipped by Congress, which would be 1968, the President said he was willing to recommend funding for the SST and we got it, but he wanted Magnuson and Jackson to have--as I recall it--eighty votes in the Senate. He said, "If you start with eighty votes, we'll be lucky to have fifty-one when it's all over." And until they could deliver eighty commitments Johnson wouldn't go with the program. They delivered eighty commitments and we barely won it in the Senate, barely won the funding. That was really it. I don't think I spent a lot of time with the President on this issue and I don't

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think the President--it was also jobs. It was Boeing. It was a lot of jobs in Washington [State].

G: Was it also a question [that] because one of the manufacturers had gotten a contract for the C-5A then the other one would need something in order to stay in business.

C: I was noticing that. I at some point, we had Lockheed and Boeing on the airframe, and Pratt and Whitney and General Electric on the engine. And I did notice I obviously got concerned at some point that if whoever had won the engine and airframe contracts for the C-5A also won the SST competition we could have a real dislocation and a real reduction of competition for defense business. I asked the President if he wanted me to have [Gardner] Ackley look at that, and he said he did. I don't know whether Ackley--I'm sure I asked Ackley to look at it; I don't know what he produced.

G: How about the sonic boom consideration?

C: Well, that was really a red herring in the sense--I mean you couldn't say it was a red herring, but there was sonic boom associations and organizations saying you'll break windows and all that stuff. The easy answer to that was, as has happened, the plane would fly across the ocean. When it got within range of land or people or where it would break glass or you'd have this sonic boom explosion, it would have to go down to a subsonic speed and that was the answer to that. That created another problem in the sense that it meant the plane could fly only to the East Coast areas supersonically, unless we could figure out a way it could go over the pole and fly into California. And I said, eventually we made what was clearly the correct economic decision and probably in every way, decision not to build the SST. I think it hasn't made any money for England or France; it's been prestigious for them.



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G: But [William "Bozo"] McKee was for it, is that right?

C: Well, McKee was for it and anybody that sat at the FAA was for it. Johnson did things for lots of reasons and we needed McKee aboard on the Department of Transportation. We talked about that. We gave him a higher grade, gave him more money or something, more prestige to get him to agree to have the FAA fold into the Department of Transportation. And I'm sure the President was not without thinking about this. I think probably Johnson was genuinely uncertain as to how far we ought to go with it and a couple of hundred million dollars for this kind of investment. We, the government, were acquiring all the rights to whatever we learned, but it just wasn't economically viable.

G: Now McKee seems to have wanted it in the Defense Department.

C: McKee was worried about the lack of capacity in the FAA to judge--we're running a competition now on incredibly complicated, technical stuff. McKee was worried about the lack of capacity in the FAA to determine who the winners were, to set the right kinds of tests, the right kinds of specifications, and it was a capacity he knew the Defense Department had. McNamara didn't want it and he sure as hell didn't want it in the air force. He said he didn't want it because he didn't want to look like he was reaching for programs but he really didn't want to have to fight the air force on this issue as well as others. So ultimately what we worked out was that the evaluation moved to the Department of Defense but we did it out of the secretary of defense's office, out of the director of defense research and engineering and the assistant secretary for planning and evaluation.

G: The air force was opposed to it, is that [right]?

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C: The air force--no, he didn't want to fight the air force. The air force would have quickly fallen in love with it, if they thought it was another source of funds that they could get. The air force would have opposed it if it were going to be a substitute for other programs they wanted. I don't think the air force disagreed with McNamara's assessment that we didn't have a national security need for [a] supersonic transport plane. And they would have been a much more formidable adversary on either side of the issue if they'd become an adversary. If they decided they wanted to develop these engines and air frames, they would have been much more difficult to deal with on the Hill than the FAA was.

(Interruption)

G: --V-1?

C: No, I don't think this ever got hooked up in that connection, because nobody had any illusions that you could build--the thought of the cost of building a supersonic plane, huge supersonic plane, I think they wanted the B-1 bomber. They didn't want to add to that what incredible costs would've been [required] to develop an airframe that could withstand those speeds and that size, carry that weight.

One of the problems even with the existing SST is that it's not only economically unviable because you have so few people on it. It has less economic viability also because you can't carry mail; you can't carry a lot of stuff.

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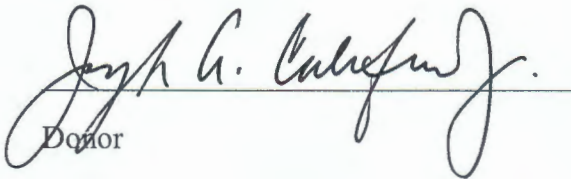
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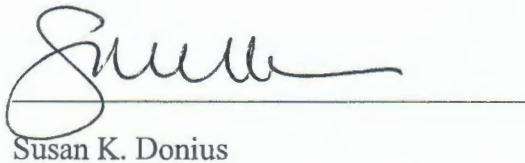
Joseph A. Califano

Interviewed by: Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz and Michael L. Gillette

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