

## INTERVIEW LIII

DATE: AUGUST 16, 1989

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR., with comment by Marcel Bryar

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

C: Some time in either late 1965, probably early 1966, when we were working on the consumer program for the President, the President tried to run me down one day. And I was at Sibley Hospital with my son, who had gotten a bottle of aspirin, and after he got over his annoyance as to why I wasn't in the White House, he asked me what happened, and I told him. His instant reaction was that that could happen to any child, that was an outrage, and we should put in our law--we were preparing a Child's Safety Act, which had other provisions in it relating to hazardous substances and warning labels on household stuff. We ought to do something so that kids can't get into aspirin bottles, and off of that, we found out that there were these safety caps on bottles, and we put [that] in the Child Safety Act; one of the provisions of the law was that you had to put safety caps on all pharmaceuticals that could be dangerous to anybody. We put it on, and it was passed, and that's how the safety cap thing got in there.

(Interruption)

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In the State of the Union Message on January 12, 1966, the President--among the items he mentioned in the message, he had two sentences: quote, "Nor can we fail to arrest destruction of life and property on our highways," period. Paragraph, quote, "I will propose a Highway Safety Act of 1966 to seek an end to this mounting tragedy," period, close quote.

At that point in time, we were focussed on a series of, by and large, administrative steps in the area of automobiles, and the legislative program I presented to him in December talked about strengthening federal leadership, collecting statistics, issuing executive orders, revamping all the advisory committees. I have [also included] a large vehicle inspection programs, upgrade the quality of driver education, develop modern police and traffic control techniques, have a federal research and test center for highway safety with ground to be broken in 1968, and then to use the Highway Trust Fund to build better highways.

(Interruption)

It was clearly going to be an important element of the transportation program. But his comments on traffic safety made like the first two or three paragraphs of every story on the State of the Union--highway safety, traffic safety. And the next day--have you got that Presidential Diaries for January 13, I guess it is? I think it was really the next day. The next morning--that's right--he called me, and we talked about the State of the Union, and I said something like, "Did you notice that the traffic safety thing was mentioned high up in all these stories?" And I see here the story you just gave me and which is a separate story on it; that came the next day. He said, "Yes, and so did every other politician on

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Capitol Hill, and by god, we have to have one hell of a program!" And that, among other things, began to really refocus our sights.

B: Did you strengthen what you had written after this?

C: Well, I think things got strengthened at every stage in this proceeding. I mean, I have to go back to the beginning of this. I really should finish this.

But in any case, when I look at this, David Jones, who was periodically covering the White House for the [*New York*] *Times*--obviously we gave him a backgrounder story the next day, saying that we were going to make a major push in this area.

G: Had the [William Randolph] Hearst [Jr.] series already come out?

C: Well, Hearst for a long time had used the Hearst papers to promote highway safety, auto safety, and we piggy-backed on that, but we got him to step it up. But let me--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview LIII

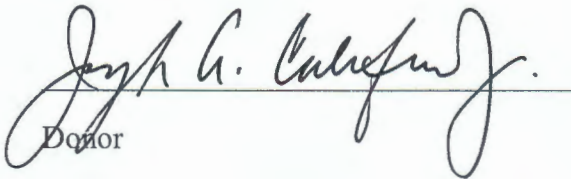
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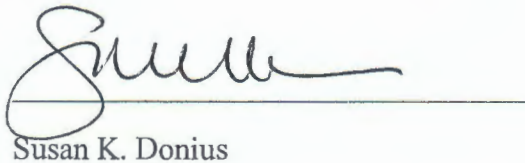
Joseph A. Califano

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

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