

INTERVIEW I

DATE: DECEMBER 5, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: JACOB JAVITS

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Senator Javits' residence, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

J: It was a time when our House of Representatives went to the Republicans, because some eighty-odd veterans of World War II were elected on the Republican side. It resulted in the Texas dominance of the House changing to the Republicans, and Joe Martin of Massachusetts replaced Speaker [Sam] Rayburn. And so I didn't have any contact that I can remember with Lyndon Johnson. I did have considerable contact with Jack Kennedy, because he, too, was a veteran and that was indirectly a relation to Lyndon Johnson. I had no direct contact.

G: You came back to Congress as a senator in 1957.

J: Right.

G: And there I assume that you had considerable association with Lyndon Johnson.

J: Immediate and considerable.

G: Would you characterize your initial impression of him at that point?

J: I have called him, before he came to the vice presidency, the most effective majority leader of our time, and he was. He was as strong as steel and, when he wanted to be, as pliant as a sapling. He had one characteristic which I admired, and that is that the Senate floor was his gridiron. Whether you were a Republican or a Democrat made no difference to Lyndon. He would try hard to persuade you, no matter what your party or

Javits -- I -- 2

whatever you thought or were working for, and it made him a formidable floor leader and a towering figure in the Senate.

G: What was the basis of his power?

J: He was very forceful, very persistent, and very strong in his convictions. He was also very strong in supporting and rewarding his friends and riding over those who disagreed with him. One of the earliest efforts I made on the floor, he rode over me and beat me down by a vote of well into the high seventies to nineteen.

G: Was this on Rule 22?

J: I can't remember. No, on that he turned very sympathetic and brought about a major change. [It was] on some other matter.

G: But you were--excuse me, I interrupted you. You were referring to another bill.

J: Another, yes.

G: What happened after--?

J: I just got licked, that's all, on that one. But I think he admired my work on Rule 22, the cloture rule, which I started very early on. The civil rights struggle was one in which he was deeply involved and for which he had great sympathy.

G: How did LBJ reward those who supported him?

J: Well, there are many things you can do. They go from an infinitesimal reward like a small private office in the Capitol called a Senate hideaway, to trips abroad of various gradations, appointments to special committees, campaign funds.

G: Would the campaign funds be limited to Democrats or would he find money for Republicans that supported him?

J: Well, I think Lyndon could find favors, including money--nothing illegitimate--properly

Javits -- I -- 3

for anybody he wanted, to reward a Republican or a Democrat.

G: In assessing this whole range of, shall we say, carrots that he could provide, how important was the campaign fund-raising, do you think, in his power as majority leader?

J: Well, I think then not as big a factor as it is now, because campaigns were not that expensive. But it was always nice to have, and if Lyndon wanted you to help him, he could be very helpful to you. I never had the benefit of any such help, but I believed it existed.

G: Did he ever offer you--?

J: Nothing, nothing, no. His characteristic gesture was to stride across the aisle and up to your desk, even though you were then a freshman, and lean over your desk, eye to eye, and grab both your lapels and try to persuade you to vote yea or nay on a given measure. That was characteristic of Lyndon Johnson. And I was subjected to that treatment from time to time, as were many others.

G: How would you contrast him to Bill Knowland?

J: Bill Knowland was a businesslike leader who would have a little meeting or talk to you in a group or personally, but without the passion and the deep sense of personal conviction in an emotional way, or without being particularly warm so that--it was very personal. Bill Knowland was more the traditional party leader. Lyndon was a unique example.

G: Was [Everett] Dirksen more like LBJ as a leader?

J: Yes, but also Dirksen was a speechmaker more like Johnson, but he would do it in words. But with Johnson, he threw everything in it: his body, his mind, his whole demeanor.

G: How do you explain LBJ's ability to get Dirksen's cooperation so much?

J: Two reasons: one, he compromised. He knew he had to have Dirksen, and so he came to

Javits -- I -- 4

him with deals it was hard to refuse. He treated him as a full partner in everything and he treated Dirksen as an equal, so they worked as a team in a way that Johnson did not do with anybody else in the Senate.

(Interruption)

G: Okay. Let me ask you about several areas of legislative activity.

J: Right.

G: First, the Lewis Strauss nomination, a very close vote.

J: Right.

G: Do you recall how LBJ was able to secure that vote against Mr. Strauss?

J: I think the combination was of Lyndon's very tight leadership on the Democratic side and the fact that not enough was made of Strauss' very high character. I think that was the combination.

G: How do you think he got Margaret Chase Smith's vote on that matter?

J: Well, how did she vote?

G: She voted against the nomination.

J: Against the nomination. He was very close to Maggie and had done many, many things for her and had a lot of credit cards, and so he called them in. She is a woman of great honor and very deeply involved in the military, and I'm sure that Lyndon used both things and that she probably didn't need too much urging.

G: Okay. Now, another issue, and this is one that you worked on together, was the defeat of some of the bills aimed at curbing the power of the Supreme Court. I think one was HR 3; another one was the [John Marshall] Butler-[William] Jenner bill. Do you recall how you were able to turn those around? One of them had already passed.

Javits -- I -- 5

J: Lyndon Johnson, like other southerners, was, whatever his feelings may have been, a devotee of the Constitution, and if he were persuaded that the Constitution was at stake, he would be very strong on the side of the Constitution. In addition, he was very convinced about the rights of the individual versus the power of the state. That was the frontiersman in Lyndon Johnson. He, I think, was typical of the West in that trait of character.

G: How did he put together the votes to defeat those bills, though, those Court bills?

J: I told you, he didn't care whether you were Republican or a Democrat, he went after you with everything he had in persuasion and in cards to play. If you wanted a bill brought up for consideration or reported out of a committee, there was nothing too small or too big for Lyndon Johnson. So you had to deal with him.

G: Let me ask you about the 1957 Civil Rights Act. You wrote about this in your autobiography [*Javits: the Autobiography of a Public Man*] in some length, but I wanted to ask first of all if there really was a problem with Title III from the standpoint of the codification of the bill, the fact that it was evidently tied to one of the reconstruction acts or something.

J: Title III was what? Remind me. What was Title III?

G: Well, this was an enforcement provision that would allow the attorney general, the Justice Department, to move against violations of civil rights.

J: Did Lyndon oppose it?

G: Yes, he did.

J: Yes.

G: But this is one that President Eisenhower seems to have backed down on rather quickly,

Javits -- I -- 6

and I just wonder if you recall why he did that.

J: In the first place, Ike admired Lyndon and Ike knew his power. Devoted as I was to Eisenhower--and I was and I owed him a great debt for his support of my election to the Senate--he was no great powerhouse on the civil rights. And in addition, the South, the southern caucus of twenty-two senators had a lot of power in the Senate, led by the sacred cow of the Senate, Richard Russell of Georgia. And even Lyndon had to tread lightly with Dick Russell, who had his own power and was, in addition, extremely able and a very great figure on this matter. Lyndon tread very warily on some of them, because of the southern bloc, many of whom were committee chairmen and very strong ones. So this was a real restraint on him, and it wasn't hard to dissuade himself that if he wanted to gain some ground on civil rights he had to make some serious concessions.

G: How did he get the western senators to accept the jury trial amendment, do you recall?

J: I can't tell you that.

G: Do you think it had to do with Hell's Canyon? Was it a trade-off?

J: I don't know.

G: The big question about the 1957 bill is if it had been stronger, if it had had more teeth in it, would the southerners have filibustered it to death, do you think?

J: My answer is yes.

G: They would have?

J: I think the seven years between 1957 and 1964 made a decisive difference, and the power of the southern senators was bent, if not broken, by public feeling, by the black nonviolent protest, by the attrition of public education, and the fact that the Congress became convinced that the South would neither secede nor rise up if you had strong civil

Javits -- I -- 7

rights law. That's what happened.

G: But you do feel that in 1957, if a stronger measure had remained, that the southerners would have filibustered it, is that right? You couldn't have overridden it.

J: Yes, I do, yes.

G: Let me ask you about Lyndon Johnson and Israel during the fifties. I'm not talking about later when he was president, I'll ask you about that later on at another time. But you sponsored a Mideast resolution and you were very involved in foreign affairs.

J: Right.

G: How would you characterize Lyndon Johnson's foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the Middle East and particularly Israel when he was majority leader?

J: I think he was a strong supporter from the very beginning. He admired their toughness and their military capacity, and he thought the Jews ought to have a place of secure refuge after what they've been through. He was strongly with them.

G: Do you think the fact that he had a lot of Jewish support reinforced this view?

J: I think the Jewish support came because of his attitude and not the other way around.

G: Another legislative issue, the National Defense Education Act in 1958, the first of the big education measures, do you recall--?

J: Well, I recall that. I was the ranking member of the Labor Committee quite early on, and I think he believed in giving people who would not otherwise have afforded it a real opportunity to higher education, and that was an element of Lyndon Johnson, the populist. And he stood up to that very manfully. He showed it there, he showed it in Medicare and in health. That was his cup of tea.

G: Anything on the space program and the hearings that he held after Sputnik?

Javits -- I -- 8

J: I did not get involved deeply in that. I had an awful lot of other things on my plate. But I supported the program.

G: Let's talk about some of the labor measures. Do you recall his role in the labor measures, particularly the [John] McClellan bill of rights amendment to the Kennedy labor measure?

J: I'm trying to think back.

G: This was the one where President Nixon I believe broke a tie.

J: Vice President Nixon?

G: Yes, Vice President Nixon.

J: I can't give you a vivid recollection, my reason being that it was obscured by my firsthand experience with [Mike] Mansfield and Bob Byrd, so I couldn't answer that.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of
JACOB JAVITS

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Marian B. Javits of New York City, New York, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with my late husband Jacob Javits on December 5, 1985 and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to researchers.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Marian B. Javits
Donor

10/29/01
Date

John W. Paul
Archivist of the United States

12-4-01
Date