

**Robert E. Jones Oral History Interview – JFK#1 05/21/1968**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Robert E. Jones  
**Interviewer:** John F. Stewart  
**Date of Interview:** May 21, 1968  
**Place of Interview:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 22 pages

**Biographical Note**

Roger W. Jones was a Representative from Alabama (1947-1977). This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] time in the House of Representatives, personal relations with JFK, and involvement in JFK's 1960 campaign, among other things.

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Robert E. Jones, recorded interview by John F. Stewart, May 21, 1968, (page number),  
John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT E. JONES

May 21, 1968  
Washington, D. C.

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: So why don't we just start by my asking you if you recall when you first met President Kennedy. It was . . .

JONES: It was the first day of the session of the 80th Congress in 1947.

STEWART: You had just been elected. . . .

JONES: We both came here in the same class.

STEWART: Do you recall your impressions of him then?

JONES: Yes. I remember very distinctly meeting him, and I was impressed with the fact that--how much hair he had. I've never seen anybody with that much hair. He was immaculately dressed. Being a freshman, I think everybody was impressed with one another. But I do recall it very distinctly that I met him on the first day.

STEWART: Had you heard of him before, or had you known anything . . .

JONES: Yes, I had, because he was the youngest member of the House in the 80th Congress and there was quite a few new Democratic freshmen and we were the

minority party and, consequently, the fraternal feelings were probably more pronounced during that session of Congress than any other that I can remember.

STEWART: Did you get to know him fairly well in that first session of . . .

JONES: Yes. Our offices were about three or four doors apart, and we saw each other regularly. A great number of evenings after the sessions were over, we would discuss common problems of freshmen members.

STEWART: What do you recall about his interest in. . . . Well, let me ask you first, did he ever talk about why he decided to run for the House or why he decided to get into politics?

JONES: No, I don't know that he was ever given too much to discuss his personal aspirations or the provocations of why he got into politics. I was impressed, more than anything else, by his lack of interest in political affairs when he first came to the House.

STEWART: His lack of interest?

JONES: His lack of interest.

STEWART: By "political affairs" do you mean affairs back in Massachusetts . . .

JONES: Or engaging himself in protracted political discussions.

STEWART: Really?

JONES: I recall one time that I scolded him for the fact that he didn't take a greater interest.

STEWART: What was his . . .

JONES: And I think of one time in the second session when we had had a fight on the floor in which Foster Furcolo took a great deal of interest. And that afternoon or that evening when we went back to the office we met, and I scolded him for the fact that he didn't take a greater interest, that he was as equally capable as Foster Furcolo and, therefore, he should take a greater interest in discussion of issues on the floor, since he possessed the capabilities and the political acumen to make measurements of political affairs, and that he should be more interested.

STEWART: What was his reaction to this, do you recall?

JONES: Well, I think he sort of shirked it off. I accused him of being lazy.

STEWART: Really? Did he admit to this?

JONES: No, I don't think he admitted to it. We played golf together off and on, and I could see that he was a man of great capabilities. He was a great athlete, he could perceive and understand political issues and problems. I think it was something that was rather latent in him, and he discovered it even after he went to the Senate.

STEWART: Did this lack of interest in politics per se carry over into his work as a representative? Was he bored with the things that he had to do?

JONES: Sometimes he acted as if he were bored, and sometimes indifferent. I often thought after he went to the Senate that maybe at times his back injuries made him feel so uncomfortable that he didn't have an appetite for a great deal of work. His office work was not too much at that time. He had a very efficient staff. He had [Timothy J., Jr.] Ted Reardon and Miss [Mary] Davis, and they kept busy. But he didn't have the number of people that would normally be required of an office. But they stayed busy, you know.

STEWART: You and he both served on the District of Columbia Committee, I believe. I don't know if that was from the start or. . . .

JONES: Yes. In the beginning of the 80th Congress we went to that committee. Another thing he didn't attend too frequently is that committee.

STEWART: Really?

JONES: No. He was rather indifferent to that committee assignment. And he'd already had another committee, and he was more interested in his primary committee than he was in District affairs.

STEWART: Education and Labor.

JONES: Yes.



- STEWART: Do you ever remember his expressing any views on, for example, home rule for the District?
- JONES: Oh, he was an earnest advocate of home rule.
- STEWART: Was he ever concerned that his attitude might get him in serious trouble with the Democratic leadership in the House?
- JONES: No, I never saw that. I don't think that I ever saw him when he was much of a worrier. He was uniform in all of his behaviors. He was not given to immediate impulses. He was guided by steadfastness in purpose. I never saw him dissuaded, to alter his course.
- STEWART: He had, of course, a lot of problems with Speaker [John W.] McCormack during that period. I don't know if you recall it.
- JONES: Yes, I do recall it. I don't think there was as much difference from Mr. Kennedy as it was Mr. McCormack. Their differences were joined. He was of an independent vein and, consequently, wanted to take into account the political reflections of his doing as it related to the political aspirations of the people of Massachusetts.
- STEWART: But you say he was never really concerned that by not getting on with McCormack this might harm him politically?
- JONES: No, I don't think so. I don't think he was ever fearful of that. As I say, he seemed to be of the mind that he would make his own political destinies.
- STEWART: To what extent, if at all, did he talk about what he was going to do in the future?
- JONES: I never had an indication from him that he aspired to be President of the United States at the time he served in the House of Representatives.
- STEWART: Did you have any indication that he aspired to be a senator or. . . .
- JONES: In the last year, yes. But I don't think that-- I never saw any indication that he was trying to displace anybody or that he went about it except in a genuine effort for public service.

STEWART: He also had a number of differences with President [Harry S] Truman during the period he was in the House: in voting, for example, against the two term constitutional amendment for President; and speaking out against policy in China and so forth. Do you recall this, and do you recall him expressing any attitudes as to why he felt he could. . . .

JONES: I don't think that while he was in the House, even though he spoke on measures of national importance, that it was deep-seated convictions--or I don't say that it wasn't a deep-seated conviction, but it was not questions of which he pursued like he did in later years when he went to the Senate. They were more of public accommodations at that time.

STEWART: Did he readily admit this, that. . . .

JONES: I think so. The reason I say that is that we had a real fight on TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] one time, and he made the charge that the Tennessee Valley Authority was stealing industries away from the New England area. I engaged him in that debate, and we had quite a hassle over it. And after it was over, he said, "Well, Bob, I think that neither one of us won, so therefore, let's cease the battle." And I said, "Well, of course, I think it's time to cease." And we never had any further difficulties about his point of view of the Tennessee Valley Authority. As a matter of fact, when he was in the Senate and later on when he was President, he was one of the chief advocates of the usefulness of the TV Authority and recognized its corporate effort to be of national help and benefit.

STEWART: Of course, in his later years in the House--well in 1952, and then in his first years in the Senate--he spend quite a bit of time and was a strong advocate of greater use of water power in Massachusetts, or in New England in general.

JONES: Yes, that was true. And I spent a great deal of time with him in the preparation of material on natural resource development while he was a member of the Senate. Also, when he became a candidate for President of the United States, he asked me to prepare papers and speech material for him. And later on, when he was nominated, he asked me to establish in the National Democratic Committee a new entity of natural resources. And then Mr. Frank Smith,

then a representative from the State of Mississippi, was placed in charge. So as far as I know, that's the first time and the only time that the Democratic National Committee utilized the opportunity of that kind of office to advocate and to extend to public understanding natural resource developments.

STEWART: We're jumping a little ahead, but let me ask you: Frank Smith says in his book that this idea to set up this committee was yours, that the suggestion was yours to set up this natural resources committee during the campaign.

JONES: Yes. And if you look at this picture of the President shaking hands with me at the time of my meeting with him at his residence in Georgetown to discuss the final plan of projecting the issues that were going to be pursued by him in the campaign. . . .

STEWART: Were there any considerations against setting up such a committee? It seems like such a logical thing, but why hadn't it ever been done in other campaigns, to set up this special natural resources committee?

JONES: I don't know. I've often wondered why it hadn't been because I know President Truman had used it so effectively in the '48 campaign, and it was not used by Mr. [Adlai E.] Stevenson in either of his campaigns. I'm quite sure that Stevenson never took into account its political significance and importance, and therefore, he never used it.

STEWART: Exactly what, politically, did you feel could be accomplished by this committee during the campaign?

JONES: Relating the federal investments throughout the history and the importance of water resource development, because I know in every geographical area of the United States the Federal Government had made huge investments in water improvements. I mean, the story of water improvements is the story of civilization itself. And so the Federal Government was inexorably tied to the developments of every section of the United States and every community. It was in pursuit of those federal dollars--to take into account what the Federal Government is doing and what it planned to do in the future and what would be reasonable to expect of those developments and how they would play a part in the future development of our country.

- STEWART: Does the fact that they knew there would be certain problems in the South have any relationship to setting this up as a private force or anything?
- JONES: No, no, no. That was. . . . No, no. The project-- the thought was far more encompassing and far more out of proportion than taking into any geographical area. It was to embrace the whole continent.
- STEWART: Getting back to 1952 or that period when he was first getting into this area in relation to New England and you say you were advising him on it, do you recall how well he understood the whole problem of water resources?
- JONES: Yes, I think probably he and President Truman are the only two Presidents since I've been a member who have really understood the necessity and the need of prudent planning and programing of our water resources developments. Even at an early date, I think he understood the harms of soiling our streams by pollution probably more than any other public official.
- STEWART: You mentioned you had this debate, so to speak, on the TVA matter while you were both in the House. Do you recall any other issues on which you differed to any great extent?
- JONES: No, I don't. I don't. If we had any disagreements, they certainly were not ones that we gave any credibility to, that would make any schism between us.
- STEWART: Did you see much of a change in, say, from 1947 to 1952, when he left the House?
- JONES: I don't know that I saw any great changes in Mr. Kennedy until after he went to the Senate. And I think the changes were remarkable, how he gained in growth and stature and understanding and a sense of responsibilities when he went to the Senate.
- STEWART: Do you recall when he first talked about running against [Henry Cabot] Lodge what he felt his chances would be? Was he always confident that he could beat Henry Cabot Lodge?
- JONES: I think so. He never had any fears of a political contest. He was well organized politically, he was well disciplined politically. So I think he

went about campaigning with mechanical assurances that his devices were in order. And he had a planned program. If there was any doubt, it was doubt within himself and his own capabilities but not of his organizational effort.

STEWART: You mentioned a while ago Foster Furcolo. Of course, later on in the 1950's considerable difficulties arose between President Kennedy and Foster Furcolo, and some people have traced these back to the time when they were both in the House. Do you recall anything more about their relationship, or what Kennedy had to speak of him?

JONES: Well, the distances gained as they served in the House, I didn't try to find the source of them because both of them were estimable, they were useful members. And even though my closeness was with John Kennedy, I never sought to encourage the distances between the two.

STEWART: And he never said where these differences arose?

JONES: Well, I heard him say some things, and they would be trade words.

STEWART: For example?

JONES: Well . . .

STEWART: May I remind you, you can close this if you want to.

JONES: Well, "Foster is a 'pissant' and always will be" or something like that.

STEWART: Yeah. But I wonder, you don't recall exactly when the differences started or the reasons why they started?

JONES: I think the differences must have started with Foster because he was envious of John Kennedy's political ambition. I think Foster was more ambitious and that he coveted the larger roles of political importance in Massachusetts. I think it was just a question of who was going to be the future white father, and Foster wanted it. I think that probably the provocation that Foster made in making claims to the hierarchies of better political station probably provoked John Kennedy into seeking it.

STEWART: Really?

JONES: I would think so; I think that was some contribution.

STEWART: Yeah. That's interesting. You said before that you felt he didn't really have strong views on any of the issues that he encountered while he was a member of the House. Did this, for example, hold true on subjects such as school aid to parochial schools where you can get into considerable. . . .

JONES: No, I don't think that he was a complete advocate when he was in the House. He had his views, but I don't think that they were such that they were too compelling on him.

STEWART: You say you saw some marked changes when he went into the Senate. Could you describe these and approximately when he started to see these changes?

JONES: Well, I would say that his general enthusiasm was noticeable and that he took more time at his work. He was really--he was growing up. And I think it had something to do with age, his reluctance--he came to the House when he was twenty-seven; he had to find himself. And maturity alone gained him greater confidence and strength and probably more desires because he was becoming more familiar with the political problems, the aspirations of the people, what really politics meant in terms of relating it to public interest and to welfare interests and to the interests of the country. He lost his provincialism when he went to the Senate. And I think that was a rather restrictive thing and a very natural thing that any young man would have at twenty-seven, hoping he might be reelected. He would feel restraints. He couldn't have the liberties that he would naturally have in the Senate as compared with the House.

STEWART: As far as his personal life while he was a member of the House, did you see him on a social, personal basis that much, or was it primarily here in the office?

JONES: Well, we would eat together--not too frequently--we would play golf, and I would see him in the office very often.

STEWART: Did he talk much, for example, about his illnesses and the pains in his back?

JONES: Not except when we played golf. Sometimes he would-- we'd play nine holes, and he would say, "Well, my back is giving me fits, and I don't believe I want to play any longer."

STEWART: Did he ever talk about the need or his desire to settle down, to get married, to settle down, during that period?

JONES: No, it was the other way around. He was always . . .

STEWART: He was . . .

JONES: We were trying to encourage him to get married and settle down, not settle down in the sense that he was given to loose living or anything like that, but. . . . I remember one time going to his apartment and opening a door to a closet, and it was completely filled with unlaundered shirts. And when I opened the door I had to spend a lot of time piling them back up. So his living conditions were such that he needed a companion to take care of his living habits.

STEWART: Were there many people who were after him to pay more attention to his duties as a congressman? Was he criticized by his friends, by people around him because he . . .

JONES: I don't think so. I don't think so. Of course, some of his most intimate. . . .

STEWART: How frequently did you see him in his early years in the Senate? You say you talked to him about this study you did of New England problems and, especially, the water power?

JONES: Well, I didn't see him--the contacts became less frequent. My obligations gained on me with longer service, and it did him. Our paths didn't touch too often. We often had visits by telephone and lunch every once in a while in his office. In the winter months he'd always have a fire in the office, and we'd go over and have a lunch together.

STEWART: But there was never any legislation that you and Kennedy were . . .

JONES: Not that I remember. I'm sure there was, but I don't recall it at the moment.

STEWART: When he went into the Senate--one of the points that's frequently been made about him is that he was always interested in the careers of people and that he enjoyed sitting down and . . .

JONES: I've never known him to lose interest in a single person he ever knew. And his interest in people was so genuine that--it was such that people became attached to him and he had an affection for them, and I don't think it ever waned.

STEWART: Would he ask you about people that you had known back in. . . .

JONES: Oh, yes, yes. He would. He would ask me about people that had been our associates and who we knew mutually. No, he never was given to forget.

STEWART: Who would you say--say, four or five people in the House whom he knew the best during the time he was there or that he spent the most time with.

JONES: Well, the Frank Thompson of New Jersey, who was not a member at the time that Mr. Kennedy served in the House, but they were close friends. And some of his classmates; I have a picture of John Blatnik of Minnesota and Joe Evins of Tennessee, Omar Burleson of Texas, William Jennings Bryan Dorn of South Carolina.

STEWART: Is that a picture of all of the freshmen?

JONES: Not all of them, that's a group with President Truman. That was made in the Rose Garden at the White House in 1947. And that's the group there. Of course, he was always very close to the members of the 80th Congress who came in as freshmen.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in his vice-presidential efforts in 1956? Were you at the Convention?



JONES: No, I was not. I wasn't at the Convention in 1956.

STEWART: Do you recall, for example, talking about it with him afterwards? He got quite a bit of support from the South, and a certain amount from Alabama, I believe.

JONES: Yes. Well, the support that came from the South that went to Kennedy at that time was not so much for Kennedy but it was for a denial of the Southerners to support Estes Kefauver. So they had great fun about that later on, because that was the effort that was being made by the Southern delegates at that time at the Convention.

STEWART: When, do you recall, did it become apparent to you that he was going to make a run for it in 1960, and were you surprised that he decided to . . .

JONES: I don't recall whether at that time I . . . I thought about it, but I don't recall the--he didn't confide with me that he was going to become a candidate till I saw it in the newspaper.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in any of his efforts before the Convention?

JONES: Yes, in the preparation of material, speech material in particular, and making an analysis from state to state about the issues and involvement of those states in resource development.

STEWART: Could you explain how you got into this; did he come and ask you to do this, and exactly how it all came about?

JONES: Well, there was a general invitation to participate in his campaign. I told him the best way I could serve would be in the field that I had some information and knowledge. And that was the reason why I participated in those fields.

STEWART: This was before the Convention?

JONES: Yes.

STEWART: And you say you made a state by state analysis of the . . .

JONES: Resource development programs and the genesis of their petition to the Congress and how they affected the state and the status of the projects and the general prognosis of their development.

STEWART: And how exactly did they use this, do you know?

JONES: He would use it in speech material if he found an audience that he thought it would--particularly in West Virginia, during the primaries, I remember I made one project analysis on Tug Fork River, which he utilized a great deal, and in Kentucky on the Big Sandy River, the Cumberland River development, the Greenup Lockand Dam, the relationship of watershed development programs with land utilization. Those are the kind of things that we put together to make a national issue, make some sense to the local populace.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in trying to get delegates for him in any other . . .

JONES: No, no, I was not. There's nothing I could have done about that.

STEWART: He had had a certain relationship with Governor [John] Patterson in Alabama.

JONES: Yes. At the Convention in 1960.

STEWART: Yes, and before there had been some efforts, I think, to get a few votes. Were you a delegate?

JONES: No, I was not.

STEWART: You weren't at the . . .

JONES: I've never been a delegate to the or present at the Convention.

STEWART: You weren't at the Convention at all, had nothing to do with it?

JONES: No. No.

STEWART: Did you have any role in Alabama politics after the Convention, during the campaign?

JONES: Well, as I say, during the campaign . . .

STEWART: I mean aside from that.

JONES: I was here most of the time preparing material-- which Mr. [Frank] Smith was dispatching at the Convention--and making brochures, making up pamphlets or making addition, writing editorials on a subject that I had some information on.

STEWART: Was this whole operation left pretty independent by people downtown, Robert Kennedy and Steve Smith and these people?

JONES: As far as the material that went into his speeches, Mr. [Frank] Smith and I prepared almost all of it. And, of course, not all of it got into his speech but excerpts for the proper occasion. But the material was always present for his use.

STEWART: But as far as the operation of this committee . . .

JONES: No, no. The operation of the committee was just an integral part of the overall operation of a big political campaign.

STEWART: This committee prepared a report, didn't they, which they submitted in January?

JONES: Yes, in general.

STEWART: Do you recall any differences among the committee members over the content of their report?

JONES: No, I don't remember a single thing.

STEWART: It was a fairly smooth operation?

JONES: I've got to make that roll call.

STEWART: If you have to go, then just speak up. Let me ask you: During the transition period, were you involved in recommending anyone for any positions in the new Administration?

JONES: No, I don't think so. Later on I supported Frank Smith, and I talked with the President about his appointment to the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority. When Mr. Kennedy became President, he corralled a very fine group, a splendid force, and consequently, their appointments were worthwhile. I don't think there was any mad rush; they were examined and tested for

excellence. And I think probably more than any other forceful thing in the President's mind was to get people who could do a creditable job. I think that was more important in his thinking than political rewards.

STEWART: Let me ask you a few questions about the general relations of the White House and you as a member of Congress. Can you recall any particular votes on which you were really pressed by either the President or people on his staff?

JONES: No, I never was. I don't know that there was too many solicitations made of me. And as far as I can recall, there was fewer contacts between the federal agencies, or the heads of federal agencies, and the members of Congress in the Kennedy Administration than in any administration that I've served in.

STEWART: What is the reason for this, or what do you feel. . . .

JONES: Well, perhaps it was due to the fact that Mr. Kennedy knew of my--or the Administration people knew of my general position, one that I'd occupied throughout the years, and they knew the general direction which I would pursue.

STEWART: There were very few occasions when you voted contrary to an Administration proposal.

JONES: Well, you have to remember this; during the Kennedy tenure in the House and my tenure, I was a little bit more liberal than Mr. Kennedy.

STEWART: Really?

JONES: Yes.

STEWART: Were you ever--do you feel that the people in the White House and the President fully understood the positions that people like yourself had to take on matters of civil rights . . .

JONES: Oh, yes, yes, of course they did, and do today. So I don't think they expect the impossible. They know the situations which you come from, and they know the political habits of the people and the responses of their representatives would make on certain issues.

- STEWART: But you were never involved in any of the problems that the Administration had in Alabama in any way?
- JONES: Well, I don't know that we had problems that. . . . They were entirely different, if I understand your question.
- STEWART: Well, I'm thinking, for example, of the so-called Freedom Rides in 1961 and the demonstrations in Birmingham in 1960.
- JONES: Well, we didn't have them in our area, and, consequently, I saw no reason for my involvement one way or the other.
- STEWART: Let's see. And you say you were never pressed, in your recollection, on any votes that you might otherwise have . . .
- JONES: Well, I was called upon time and time again to make analyses for certain measures in which I made an estimate or a poll as to what they could expect. But it wasn't a request as to how I would vote on it.
- STEWART: As far as the federal aid highway program is concerned--of course, there was a probe into the Massachusetts situation--did this have any political overtones to your knowledge, or were there any . . .
- JONES: Not to my knowledge.
- STEWART: . . . political considerations at all?
- JONES: I never heard of any.
- STEWART: There was certainly no hint that the thing should . . .
- JONES: No, I never heard the least intimation that the Kennedy people in Massachusetts were ever involved in it.
- STEWART: In 1963 there was legislation that I believe you handled relative to extending the time for the Center for the Performing Arts to raise the money and increase the number of trustees. Were you always in favor of this, this legislation?
- JONES: Yes. The President and I had discussed it some time before then. And the question you asked was the second installment; the authorization had been

passed prior to then. There was a time limitation on the original act for raising the money--of course, by voluntary contributions. At the time of the original enactment we didn't know whether we were on sound grounds or not; the publicity hadn't been extensive enough. For the people to find responses, we had to extend the time and enlarge the number of trustees in the hope of obtaining a little bit more money.

STEWART: But you say you had talked with the President about this?

JONES: Yes, we had, and the unfortunate fact that the District of Columbia, which would be about the only principal capital in the entire world that was without the housing for the performing arts. The need and the requirement was such that the President felt like it was necessary for us to have that kind of accommodations for our people.

STEWART: Was there any talk at that time of having some federal funds involved in the thing?

JONES: Yes, we discussed that, but it was felt that if it could be raised on voluntary contributions, it would relieve the tensions and apprehension of federal control. Those sort of things were discussed. And it was the notion of the President and those associated with the cause that it would be better without federal funds.

STEWART: Where did the idea originate after the assassination to change the name to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, do you recall?

JONES: No, I don't at the moment. I think it was rather a spontaneous suggestion that grew in support due to the fact that the President had been so interested in the project. And so had Mrs. [Jacqueline B.] Kennedy.

STEWART: Were you always in favor of both the name change and making this the sole national memorial to President Kennedy?

JONES: Yes, I thought it was fitting. I don't know that I fully subscribe to the sole notion, or the notion that it should be the sole memorial for President Kennedy, because stature and importance in history would be gained, and a limitation such as that would not be wholesome for the future.

STEWART: In January 1961 you introduced the bill to, I believe, postpone until 1962 the changes in the price support base for cotton. In general, were you satisfied with the cooperation you got from the Administration on the whole matter of price supports for cotton?

JONES: Generally, I was. It was a very difficult problem, both for the Administration and for us here in the Congress. We had so many divergent views that had been espoused by the different geographical areas that produce cotton, the different types of cotton, that we had a most difficult time making any resolve of the problem. And cotton is a very complicated matter to deal with. Its economics are so interwoven with social problems and a distressing agricultural picture that to update it and to make laws useful to cotton production is about as difficult and as complicated as any item that I deal with legislative.

STEWART: Do you recall ever talking to the President about this whole area?

JONES: Yes. Senator [Vance] Hartke and I had a conference with him. I think it was in September, maybe the year before, that we had a conference with the President about the cotton situation generally. I'm quite sure that the President, like so many things, couldn't evaluate the details of the problem. Even though I live in an agricultural area--our chief agricultural product is cotton--I still sometimes feel I know less about it than anybody else; the more I study it the more frustrated sometimes I become. But his sympathies were with the problem and how it did affect the people who were producing it, because they were representing the lowest economic group in our country.

STEWART: Do you recall in any more specifics as to what you were trying to get him to do or agree to at this particular meeting?

JONES: Well, we were talking about the reapportionment of acreage at that time. That was the thing that we had uppermost in mind.

STEWART: But you don't recall that you were asking him, personally, to do, or was it just a matter of . . .

JONES: Well, generally, it was used to gain his sympathy to the problems that were involved. And the Secretary--we had had a discussion with him. I don't remember the details of that. But the President can't

give total time to any one single problem. We had to acquaint him generally with what our hopes were with cotton legislation-- hoped that they would be with cotton legislation.

STEWART: Was it your feeling, as some people have expressed, that matters of natural resources didn't get much interest from the White House level during the Kennedy Administration, that it was a fairly low priority subject?

JONES: Well, yes, probably that's true. However, I don't think it was a lack of interest; I think it was a competing--or more compelling--problems that were arising in our international affairs that required the President's time and his devotions more than domestic subjects at that time.

STEWART: Are there any aspects of the Department of Interior's program that you feel suffered because it didn't receive the attention of the White House to the degree that it might have?

JONES: Not specifically. Not specifically. As I say, the general advancement is, I think, the proper measurement, not specific items. As I say, we had the Bay of Pigs: we had almost every kind of international problem to arise and emerge; so the President had to devote most of his attention and his thoughts to that.

STEWART: You have some pictures on your wall of the President's visit to Alabama in 1963. That was in June, I believe?

JONES: Well, that was the hottest day in the world; it must have been in the summertime.

STEWART: What do you recall about that trip? Were you, for example, with him when he--did you fly down with him, or. . . .

JONES: No. I met him at Huntsville; I was already in Alabama with Mr. Thomas, Congressman Albert Thomas; the Vice-President Mr. [Lyndon B.] Johnson; Mr. [James E.] Webb, Administrator of NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]; and Wernher von Braun. We met the President there and then made a tour of the installation. The President on that day was full of fun. He was trying to, at his level best, to provoke arguments between some of the people in NASA here and Wernher, and so they'd get into heated discussions



and controversies. I think the President enjoyed that as much as anything I can recall; he was fresh, and he had a great day of it. We saw a firing, a static firing, of the Jupiter missile, and he was quite impressed with that. But that's the second time I had been with the President at Huntsville.

STEWART: When was the first?

JONES: Well, he came down the year before and spoke at Vanderbilt University at Nashville, came down to Muscle Shoals, and then we came from Nashville down to Huntsville by helicopter. And I have here a cigarette lighter which was distributed by a commercial company, a cigarette company. I didn't have any matches. I sat opposite the President on the helicopter, so he gave me this lighter, which I still have in my desk. I lost it, and I just ran across it about a couple of months ago, and I wanted it.

STEWART: That's interesting. Well, that wasn't the flight that Governor [George C.] Wallace was with him. That would have been in 1963.

JONES: That was the flight that Governor Wallace was with him.

STEWART: In '62?

JONES: I believe it was '62.

STEWART: Oh. Do you recall any of that conversation?

JONES: Yes, I recall the President asked me, prior to boarding the helicopter, whether he should talk to Governor Wallace about his policy on the treatment of the Negroes, about what had happened in Montgomery, and I told him that I didn't think that any good could come of it and I saw no gains, no profit. So as soon as he sits down in the helicopter, in spite of the advice I had given to him, he immediately commenced to get into Governor Wallace and tell him that the practices and policies that he was going to pursue would visit great injuries on the State of Alabama and he wanted the Governor to know exactly what his position would be; he could expect stern measures if Governor Wallace didn't cease and desist of his insistence on flaunting the federal authority.

STEWART: Were there just the three of you in . . .

JONES: No. Senator [John J.] Sparkman, Senator [Lister] Hill, Congressman Albert Rains, and Congressman [Carl] Elliott and I were in . . .

STEWART: Were part of this conversation?

JONES: Not part of the conversation, but we were the audience to the conversation.

STEWART: Was the President a lot more insistent and demanding than you had assumed he would be?

JONES: Yes, indeed; I thought he'd let it pass, but he didn't.

STEWART: What was Governor Wallace's reaction?

JONES: Well, believe it or not, the Governor took it like a little child that had been chided. He didn't make any responses.

STEWART: Really? This was specifically about the integration of schools?

JONES: Yes. That was part of it. But the President was talking in general terms to the Governor, not about specifics.

STEWART: About as far as the University of Alabama was concerned, or. . .

JONES: Well, that might have been his intention, but the President didn't mention any word about what he was going to expect.

STEWART: To the extent of, for example, telling him that federal troops would be sent in if there were difficulties?

JONES: I don't remember that, as I say, he got into specifics. But he let him know that he was going to take leave of every instrument he had at his command to see that there wouldn't be any further interference.

STEWART: Did you talk to him after this helicopter ride about his conversation with Governor Wallace?

JONES: Yes, he kidded me and laughed when he said, "I'm glad I took your advice." [Laughter]

STEWART: He seemed proud of what he had done, I assume?

JONES: Well, the President was--I always was impressed by the fact that he was always given to purpose and he wasn't a worrywart and he did it in a nice, very deliberate way. I didn't think that he could be quite as stern as he was with the Governor, but he was and seemed to relish the part he had played.

STEWART: Really? Is there anything else about either of those trips that stands out in your mind?

JONES: Yes, being with him and being out in people and examining a project and some of the public efforts that he witnessed, I was always impressed with his enthusiasm of seeing people and seeing accomplishments and seeing the total effort. I think he could take into account the national efforts and the national goals, and they always scored with him. I've never seen him upset; I've never seen him disturbed to the point of distraction; he was always on even keel, always pleasant and could be quite firm without being offensive or demanding.

STEWART: Okay. Unless there's anything else, I guess that's about it.

JONES: Alright, Mr. Stewart.

STEWART: Thank you.