

**Jacob K. Javits Oral History Interview – RFK#3, 06/07/1973**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Jacob K. Javits  
**Interviewer:** Roberta Greene  
**Date of Interview:** June 7, 1973  
**Place of Interview:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 5 pages

**Biographical Note**

Javits was a Senator from New York from 1957 through 1981. In this interview Javits discusses working with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] on the national scenic riverway bill and other legislation involving the Hudson River; the Storm King Mountain power plant and environmental concerns; and RFK's interest in New York state matters versus more national issues, among other issues.

**Access**  
Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed July 29, 1974, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about

accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

Jacob K. Javits, recorded interview by Roberta Greene, June 7, 1973, (page number), Robert Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By JACOB JAVITS

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Jacob Javits of Washington, D.C., do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recordings and transcripts for the interviews conducted at New York on June 19, 1970 and at Washington, D.C. on April 10, 1973 and June 7, 1973 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interviews are to be opened immediately to general research.
2. I retain literary property rights to the interviews until my death, at which time the literary property rights shall be assigned to the United States Government.
3. For so long as I retain literary property rights to the interview, researchers may not publish quotations without my express written permission in each case.
4. When the interview is opened to research, copies may be provided to researchers and to other institutions, on request, for deposit in their collections.
5. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JACOB JAVITS

DATE

7/15/74

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES

DATE

July 29, 1974

Third Oral History Interview

with \_\_\_\_\_

SENATOR JACOB JAVITS

June 7, 1973  
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program  
of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay. Do you remember talking to Robert Kennedy about that joint response on the national scenic riverway bill which sort of corresponded to [Richard L.] Ottinger's bill in the House [of Representatives] side? This was in '65.

JAVITS: Yes, I remember, generally, though I don't have a very clear recollection of the bill itself. But I remember discussing the real effort to secure the scenic beauties of the Hudson River, as you got beyond the Palisades on the west side and beyond the bridge on the east side.

GREENE: Originally, I understand, you were working on two separate bills and at some point you came together. Do you remember anything about that?

JAVITS: Yes, we were working on two separate bills with the same general objective, which was to endeavor to beautify the shoreline and subordinate the railroad line and not add to the marring of the beauty by an automobile road, which was then kind of a throughway then in contemplation, on the ground that this was a unique and most beautiful part of the United States and our own state of New York, and that the demands of industrialization and speedy communication should not blight this particular area if we

could avoid it; and we thought we could avoid it. Bobby Kennedy was just as practical as I am about the fact that the interests of eighteen million plus New Yorkers is in a sound economy, but we both felt that you can't sacrifice every living value to what might or might not be a material factor in a sound economy for the state. In this particular situation this was not the only option available to us for speedy intrastate communication. I think we were absolutely right, and I think that it resulted in a very considerable recession of the interest in this shoreline traffic artery.

GREENE: One of the things that became quite controversial was the Storm King project, the Storm King Mountain power plant.

JAVITS: Well, I think on Storm King the question was more building it so that it didn't mar the beauty of Storm King Mountain, and taking all the precautions in terms of safety of an atomic power plant which experience had indicated were available. The main question was, Would the heat generated in the water, which would be used to cool the units, destroy the fish life in the Hudson? I was very concerned about the delay in the plant, because we need atomic power urgently. So was Mr. Kennedy, again illustrating the dichotomy of his nature, which was both practical and idealistic. But we were both satisfied that more could be done than was being done, and indeed, in my judgment, more was done as a result of this effort.

GREENE: Do you remember Governor [Nelson A.] Rockefeller's role in this?

JAVIST: Well, Governor Rockefeller was painted into the corner because he was so deeply interested in the economic progress of the state, of being for this Hudson road and for the plant. But, I know the governor quite well and so did Kennedy. Neither of us believed that this represented actually any antagonism by the governor, either to conservation of natural beauty, or risk taking in respect of economic development, power development to be specific, in this case. The semantics were very poor, and I believe that it did not represent any irreconcilable break between Senator Kennedy and the governor.

GREENE: What about the whole difference of opinion between yourselves and the governor on how much federal involvement there should be in that area? It seems to me he was opposed to it and you two were supporting it.

JAVITS: Yes. Well, that was very natural. We were in the federal establishment. We felt that whatever influence we would have on these projects would have to come from the federal



establishment. Now, the governor wanted to get the job done as governor of New York, and he thought it essential to New York's economy. I think Senator Kennedy felt, just like I did, that it was that old story of he's doing what he has to do and we're doing what we have to do.

GREENE: Then again in 1966, Ottinger again introduced legislation, this time virtually banning all man-made encroachments, and you two more or less split with him on that. Do you remember that period at all?

JAVITS: Yes, again it was this interesting two sides to Senator Kennedy's nature, the practical man and the idealistic man. We felt that by this time Ottinger was going way beyond what reason would dictate, and Senator Kennedy had the capacity for a certain self-discipline in this regard. Much as he sympathized with the "forever wild" theory, he realized that we had to make accommodations with a huge population and a competitive society, and the competition of New York with other states for business and employment. I felt and he felt that the pendulum had swung with Ottinger much too far, and we didn't go along with him.

GREENE: Okay. I'd like to know a bit about what you know about the governor's relationship with Senator Kennedy.

JAVITS: Are you going to be able to interview the governor?

GREENE: Yes.

JAVITS: Well, I think that would be the best source. I really have not seen them much together. I think Senator Kennedy was never overweened by Governor Rockefeller, and certainly Governor Rockefeller was never overweened by Senator Kennedy. I think that they conducted themselves very much as equals, very sophisticated politicians. I think there was a lot of banter between them attributable to their complete freedom with each other and, I don't think, any real sense of competition. In a very interesting way, I don't think that either ever regarded the other as a natural competitor. They might conceivably, had Bobby lived and had he lived until today, see each other as opponents in a presidential race. But it was not in their nature. I can think of many politicians in their position who, in their personal relations, would be squaring off. That was never the case with them. They were urbane, they were charming with each other, had fun, and lots of banter, and great no-holds-barred in terms of not only equality, but complete ease. I think that was greatly to the credit of both men.

GREENE: On this Hudson River, just as an environmental issue, how would you compare the interest and, let's say, the passion that Robert Kennedy brought to a subject like that with what he might have brought to Bedford-Stuyvesant?

JAVITS: I think it was very much of a piece. I think that he wanted to conserve human values wherever he found them. I think it was a passion for life with him. I think that really marked the man. He was passionately devoted to whatever was a vivid life expression. He had a lot of it himself in his own nature and it poured out especially in projects which commanded that kind of allegiance. That was my feeling about Bobby Kennedy. His, essentially, was a life force as a senator and as a man. Issues that had a life force quality, especially when they were vivid, attracted him greatly.

GREENE: In the interview that you did with [William J.] vanden Heuvel. . . . Did you want to stop?

JAVITS: One last question and then we'll stop.

GREENE: Okay. I was just going to ask you, you said in that interview that his interests extended way beyond New York State, and I wondered if you ever got the feeling that maybe he didn't have as much interest in the state. . . .

JAVITS: Well, I think he was too disciplined a politician, and he liked politics too much, to fail to pay attention to his state or to think he was too big to attend to his state. He didn't. As a matter of fact, it was the fact that he had that coloration that enabled him first to be elected though he didn't live in the state. The people there didn't feel that he would be a non-state senator. But he really interested himself in the state, and gave to the state whatever was available to him in the way of prestige, and that was a lot; and the ability to get things done through a democratic dominated Senate and Congress.

GREENE: Did you ever find any trouble in getting him interested in specific New York matters?

JAVITS: No, no, no. I never ran into a situation where he would tell me, you know, "I'm too busy," or, "That isn't big enough," or, "It doesn't involve enough states." No, no. I found him entirely willing to be the other senator of a state.

GREENE: What about the way his Senate staff and whole New York operation. . . .

JAVITS: That was consonant with what he was doing. As a matter of fact, he had some very good people in New York, and we felt the competition very keenly, when it came to New York projects.

GREENE: Who did you have particular regard for?

JAVITS: Whoever was his chief man in New York.

GREENE: [Thomas M., Jr.] Tom Johnston?

JAVITS: Tom Johnston, right. Very good man, excellent. I had a very good man, too. So it was a very square and even show.

GREENE: Did you feel that your staffs worked fairly well together?

JAVITS: Yes, I did. They also competed very well together, both. And that's what Bobby liked and I liked.

GREENE: Did you like that?

JAVITS: Oh, yes.