

Richard B. Russell, Jr. Oral History Project
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Senator Henry Jackson interviewed by Hugh Cates
April 29, 1971

CATES: This is April 29, 1971. I'm in the office of United States Senator Henry Jackson, who is a Democrat from Washington, the state of Washington. I'm here for the purpose of talking to him about his association and his impression over the years of the late Senator Richard Brevard Russell. Senator Jackson, would you just recall, if you will, anything that comes to mind about Senator Russell as you saw him as a man?

JACKSON: Well, I first started to know Senator Russell when I went on the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy in January of 1949. I was then a member of the House, serving on that committee. Senator Russell was a ranking member from the Senate side. Subsequently, in 1953, when I was sworn in as a senator, I started my long association with him in the national security area and our relationship--personal relationship--stemmed from a community of interest and concern about the security of our country. Naturally, we had differences of opinion regarding domestic issues, whether it was civil rights or whether it was certain areas of social legislation. The interesting thing about all this is that, while we had a different approach to some of our problems at home, it did not divide us and separate us from our common concern about our national security. In this regard, Richard Russell was a selfless man. It was his overriding interest. He was deeply concerned about the problems of the South, about the problems of Georgia, whether it was industrial development or whether it was his earlier love of agriculture and the interest of the Georgia farmer. And so, the thing that I must say made our association a unique one is that we had this common interest coming from a different approach in the domestic area, but it solidified us as friends on a personal basis and as participants in the debates and the discussions of problems on national security. Senator Russell was very helpful to me in this area. He took a personal interest in my own desire to be as well informed as possible. He was always the gentleman. He went out of his way to be helpful, as everyone, I am sure, has said about him. He was a tower of integrity. I mean, he was a man of honor. His word was it. One just didn't need to ever be concerned about getting a letter from him about something. We just didn't have to operate that way. I suppose that this is the ideal type of person that we in the Northwest and in the West like to look for. As a young lawyer growing up and starting out in practice in my hometown, why, the first thing that I was informed about the type of lawyer that you couldn't trust, you couldn't depend upon. Then, they explained that all the other lawyers were the types that--all you had to do--we do it over the telephone or have an understanding and that was it. Well, Senator Russell was in the tradition of honor and integrity which--there are just not--few like him. Finally, let me say that in this general theme that I'm discussing, that Senator Russell was an extremely well-informed individual. He, as we all know, was a great student of history. Of course, he knew about all of the important battles in the War Between the States. He made it a point, however, to keep informed in a very broad sort of way, which really made it a great pleasure to chat with him and talk with him. He could articulate his position in a calm and well-presented manner that was like a breath of fresh air. He had a genius for zeroing in on the central issue. He didn't need to raise his voice. His words were so well chosen--whether it was in a

committee meeting or whether it was in a discussion with some top people at lunch; or whatever the format or background might be, Senator Russell had a genius for getting to the heart of an issue with an economy of words. When the words came out of his mouth, they were completely descriptive of the central problem.

CATES: Senator, your name has been mentioned as a possible presidential candidate. Did Senator Russell ever discuss this with you? He was, as you well know, a presidential candidate in 1952 and briefly in 1948.

JACKSON: Yes. Yes, Senator Russell last year talked to me on several occasions, said I ought to get involved in the campaign, that he would support me, that he was really concerned for the security of the country. He felt very deeply that the division within the Democratic Party could be disastrous, first for the country and second to the Democratic Party in that order. He, not too long before he died, again raised the issue and said I must get involved in it, that he couldn't see anyone else who would be able to bring the party together; and he made it very clear that he felt the big issue, of course, was the security of the country and the role that we had to play in the world. This troubled him very much. I would not--I would prefer that this not be released any time prior to 1972. I mean if it's after that date it will be all right.

CATES: Sir, we will put a time seal on this and it will not be released until after the election of 1972. Is this what you mean?

JACKSON: Yes, on this I wouldn't--it would feel--I mean some might feel that it would be a self-serving statement, but I believe--

CATES: An endorsement-type thing.

JACKSON: Yes, and there are other senators who know about this. I think Senator Talmadge and Senator--I believe Gravell [David Gambrell]--or Governor Carter--

CATES: And Senator Gambrell you mean.

JACKSON: Yes, know about it. Governor Carter in particular told me what Senator Russell had told him. But I'd rather not have it coming from me. What they say is of course entirely their matter but I, just from a self-serving point of view, I didn't want.

CATES: Senator, did he ever discuss with you the office of the presidency, I meant, as opposed to your personal candidacy; I meant, since he was a serious candidate in 1952 and, of course, he has been advisor to at least six presidents?

JACKSON: Yes, I've been involved with him when he has counseled and advised presidents. And the last time we were really together was when we met with President Nixon. Senator Russell and Senator Stennis and myself and I believe Senator Tower. Maybe one other republican senator may have been present at the time. He, of course, had such a deep respect for the office that he felt--and properly so, very much my own attitude--the need for help to a

president, whether he is a Republican or a Democrat, particularly in the area of national security. He was a partisan Democrat like I am, but he always made a point of the fact that there's a difference between how you feel towards the occupant and the office itself. The office to him was a matter that all Americans should honor--the office--and to see to it that respect is maintained toward it.

CATES: Senator, I know our time is about up, but I would like to mention--

JACKSON: Go ahead until they buzz me.

CATES: All right. I would like to mention one thing. I understand that the two of you have worked together in the Senate concerning Lockheed and Boeing and the SST and the C-5A. Would you care to comment about this?

JACKSON: Well, we did not spend much time together on this. Senator Stennis was more involved in that area than I was. I supported, of course, as he did, the C-5 appropriation because we felt that this was a very important program and I supported the continuation of the program because I felt that there was a need for whatever number was the appropriate number in connection with our logistics requirements. He, likewise, of course, I may say, from the other side of the aisle or other side of the picture. I remember so well supporting the need for an extra wing of B-52 bombers. McNamara wouldn't go along with it and time certainly demonstrated that that was a great mistake and he commented, on several occasions, how foolish it was for the defense department not to utilize the funds that we had made available for an extra wing of B-52's. In the SST fight, Senator Russell was a supporter from the very beginning. To show what kind of a man he was, in our fight in December, he left the hospital to come down and cast his vote, to be there because the vote was close, that close. Now, that's the kind of man--I mean, he literally got out of his deathbed to come to vote. He told me, he said, "I'm going to come." And that's all he had to--when he said, "I'm going to do it"--that's it! And so, we did work together on problems of common interest. I chaired the Military Construction Subcommittee for him. There are a lot of projects in Georgia that I was able to be of some help to him. Needless to say, he could do it himself, but I didn't need to talk to him about it and he didn't talk to me about it. I just understood what his interest was and concern. One must remember that Senator Russell was not the kind of senator or individual who would try to put the "arm" on someone. He was not the kind who would put pressure on another senator. He commanded such respect that--I don't want to say he didn't need to do that--he just wouldn't do it. That was not his nature. He was a gentleman. He was just an honorable, decent man and there are not too many of them.

CATES: Senator, I cannot help but make this comment to you concerning that December vote on the SST. This morning, I was talking to two doctors out at Walter Reed Hospital and one, in particular--I was talking to him about the autopsy and, of course, this was in December, the SST vote, and in January, of course, he died. His lungs had very, literally, very little elasticity and it just amazed them that he could breathe at all. And, yet, he got out of his sick bed to go down and make this vote--

JACKSON: Yes, this--

CATES: --because he thought it was critical.

JACKSON: Yes, this was, I think, the shining example. It was only--let's see, he died in--

CATES: January 21.

JACKSON: January 21, and it was just about a month. He was then on death's door and he literally walked, I mean, got up out of his deathbed to be there to vote. Because that's how he felt towards me and it was a matter of principle with him and he didn't talk about it, but I knew exactly how he felt. And we had a very unique personal relationship in that regard. I had nothing but respect for him. He knew that and I think he felt very kindly towards me and whenever, in later years, when he was not able to carry the hard floor fight when you had to raise your voice--no microphones available--he would come to me and say I want you to handle these things. This was true in the anti-ballistic missile fight; it was true in a whole series of matters that were critical, involving the defense of our country, and I felt very honored that he would ask me to defend certain important items in the budget. Of course, I was honored that he would ask me and he did that from time to time in later years because he was in declining health over a period of time; and I tried, and I don't think I ever failed him, to undertake whatever he felt I should undertake to help present the budget or whatever it might be at the time,

CATES: Senator Jackson, did he show his frustration much, if indeed he had frustration, over advice that he would give presidents from the standpoint of military affairs and the advice was unheeded or not followed?

JACKSON: He did not show it nor did he talk about it. It would come out on rare occasions when an issue would arise in which he could point out: "Well, I tried to tell them three years ago or four years ago"--or whatever the date was--"and they wouldn't listen." But he did not try to play the role of a martyr or "I told you so". This was not the nature of this modest man. He would only refer to it as a point of departure to go on to something else.

CATES: What would you say was his most outstanding personality trait?

JACKSON: Well, there's so many, I wouldn't want to set up a list of priorities. He was a warm, decent human being. He had a very nice personality. He had a quiet way about him--a wonderful twinkle in his eye. The thing, of course, from a purely business point of view, as you "do business" in the Senate, the thing that stands out are two or three or four things. One, of course, is that he was an intelligent man. He knew how to reason out and come to logical conclusions on problems. He had a judicial temperament. He could restrain himself and he never allowed any evidence of a temper ever to appear in connection with anything he was saying or doing. And running through all of this was a deep, deep sense of honor and integrity. He was intellectually honest and he hated phoniness. He'd just say what he thought, whether it was favorable or unfavorable and he was never hesitant to be critical about mistakes the South had made or mistakes that he felt that he had made I could go on and on and on, but maybe I can sum it all up that he was an honorable man.

CATES: Do you think his influence will be felt in the Senate in the future?

JACKSON: Oh, I don't think there's any doubt about it. He represented a style and a way of doing things and he provided, I hope, a living code for other senators to follow. There's just so few, I'm sure in the history of the Senate, of the stature of Senator Russell that we could ill-afford to lose him. His record is written, the precedents are there, the things that he stood for will live on; and I'm sure that his influence will be felt in the years to come, not just in the Senate and the Congress alone, but what he was able to do in the past and the things that he accomplished are--his many accomplishments will endure for years to come. What he was able to do in his lifetime as a senator have already had a profound impact on our country and I'm sure that all of these accomplishments will endure for years to come.

CATES: Senator, before closing this taping session, I was just wondering if you have any other observations that you would like to make about Senator Russell and your association with him?

JACKSON: I think I've pretty well covered the high points. If I had the time to dig into special situations in which we were involved in in connection with our committee work, I would be able to add a lot more. But I've tried to address myself to the character of the man--his behavior, his attitude toward his own state, his people, his country, and the world. And this man had everything that certainly one should have to be a statesman and a distinguished public servant and he achieved both.

CATES: Thank you very much, Senator Jackson, for a very excellent interview on your part. Thank you.

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