

INTERVIEW WITH
Maxwell M. Rabb
on
May 13, 1975
for
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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This is an interview with Mr. Maxwell Rabb at his office in New York City on May 13, 1975. The interviewer is David Horrocks of the Eisenhower Library.

MR. HORROCKS: Mr. Rabb, a lot of background material has been covered in other interviews, so I think we'll just go right into this one area that we would like to talk about today and that's the Cabinet Secretariat. Could you tell us how that was formed and why?

MR. RABB: The Office of the Cabinet Secretary was formed about October of the first year that President Eisenhower was serving out his term. It took a little while to develop the approach and it then took a very firm hold thereafter because it was a way to bring the Cabinet together and to make the meetings meaningful. I was designated as the first secretary of the Cabinet. Previously I was serving as associate general counsel to the President and as the assistant to the assistant to the President--probably one of the longest titles in all history and when used on stationery took up about half the sheet. I was the so-called right arm of Sherman Adams. But if I recall, it was October, 1953, that I was designated for this post, and I served in that particular capacity until I left the White House in June, 1958.

MR. HORROCKS: What sort of problems had arisen between the inauguration and October '53 that necessitated the Cabinet Secretariat?



RABB: President Eisenhower, of course, was a man who believed in having his team around him and having his team take on tasks and perform them themselves under his guidance and instructions. His feeling was that a Cabinet meeting without having been thought out in advance would provide a great deal of repetition, would involve many people hiding items that should have been brought in for consideration--under no circumstances having an opportunity to see the light of day. He wanted people to speak but wanted them to speak in a way that just did not mean a sheer consumption of time and words without any real meaning behind them. And he thought that a well-organized group such as the Cabinet in a more tightly knit pattern along the lines of the National Security Council would be effective. And I do believe it was effective.



HORROCKS: Did he have this sort of thing in mind when he was inaugurated in '53?

RABB: I don't know. I don't think he had that in mind, but he always talked about a strong Cabinet. And later on, if you want me to, I will tell you what the advantages were and what actually came out of this type of action.

HORROCKS: Well, why don't we do that right now?

RABB: All right. Eisenhower was very proud of this Cabinet. It was not a Cabinet that, in the main, was there to fill in just political debts. There obviously were political overtones on a

good deal of this but the people had to be proven people. He wanted in his Cabinet men and women who had names and reputations to sustain, would be able to make a contribution or make contributions that would help the country. And his feeling was that they did not have to be the greatest expert in their particular field, but if they were basically leaders, if they were people who knew an area well and could give a general direction in that area and had nationwide contacts in many other fields, there would be a wide scope given to his cabinet. In these terms he was thinking, of course, of Secretary [John Foster] Dulles, who was an outstanding lawyer in the United States. He had Henry Cabot Lodge, for the first time brought in the U.N. to have a sense of representation over there. He had Charles Wilson, who obviously was the most formidable figure in the world of industry. He had college presidents in his group-- [Harold] Stassen, [Arthur] Flemming. There were men from the business world-- [Marion] Folsom at a later date. But the general idea was to have someone like Oveta Culp Hobby who was woman, yes, and in that sense, even way back in 1953, represented a tremendous innovation in government life--though Francis Perkins had been previously designated by another President as a Cabinet member-- and was a female and therefore began to cut a new path. But Oveta Culp Hobby was a publisher, she was a person of force and distinction, and bringing her in for a brand new department like Health, Education and Welfare gave a substance to the Cabinet.



Now you would go around and think of the others--[Herbert] Brownell, in the legal field; and [Fred] Seaton, who later came in as the Secretary of the Interior, another publisher. We had, as I say, Henry Cabot Lodge, who had been a United States Senator. Nixon was a United States Senator, so Congress's impact would be felt there. And [James] Mitchell--at that time [Martin] Durkin, when we first started--but by the time we put the Cabinet together, my recollection is that Durkin had gone. But still here was a man who had come from a faction in the spectrum that did not support the President, the AFL-CIO. It was a very unusual experiment and he brought him in.

There were others there of great distinction. The people that surrounded the President--[George] Humphrey as Secretary of the Treasury was a man new entirely to the field of politics but he was an outstanding businessman and the strength of his character and of his opinions were very soon felt. Whatever else you could say, this was a Cabinet that had considerable impact, when you realized that he wanted to bring people together. Sinclair Weeks, who had a tradition of politics but who was an outstanding businessman in other fields than the large automotive fields. He'd been in the fine New England work of silversmiths, and he had also a company very well known throughout the world that worked with parts of machinery that required great art and ability.



When you put it together, this was a group that was not inspired by sheer politics by any manner of means; it was meant to be a group to do something for the country. And Eisenhower felt that instead of letting them drift and come into a meeting and then say what was on their minds or not say what was on their minds -- which was equally important to them sometimes if they didn't want to disclose problems--somebody had to be there to bring together the meeting; to make sure the presentations were short, to the point; that all the puff had been taken out of it beforehand; that we could reach a decision quickly; to make certain that other decisions were not put under the table, which was one of the great problems of government--people do not like to disclose before the supreme boss just how much difficulty they're having. And conflicts could be taken care of there.

HORROCKS: So you're saying that the Cabinet was definitely not just a body of discussion and advice but of decision making.

RABB: Oh, no question about it. And what was new about this Cabinet? It was first of all organized in the sense that there was a secretary of the Cabinet--it was I. I sat at every meeting, directed the agenda, saw to it that the agenda was distributed before the meeting. I talked it over with the staff and principally with Sherman Adams and with the President and made certain that items were put on that they wanted. I told them what else would probably go on, and if necessary, gave a rundown before the meeting



so that everyone was prepared--that is in the staff and particularly the President. It wasn't just merely listing an item. If we had something that had to go on the agenda, we would sometimes give it a dry-run and have a series of meetings of what you might call the Sub-Cabinet (the Sub-Cabinet would be the groups and departments and agencies that were involved in a decision) so that we didn't overlook anybody and we didn't just have one point of view presented there. It was a very, very fair procedure.

Now what do I mean by that? If we had a question -- and I just take this one though it's far from being the most serious one we ever had to take up in the Cabinet--we had the question "civil defense." Civil defense was in the hands of Governor [Val] Peterson at the time and Governor Peterson was the head of that agency. But to let him just come out with a decision when we were entering into the atomic age in a way which seemed to indicate that not only we have that instrument, but others were very likely to have it soon, it was something we had to deal with very carefully. And so we'd have to call into a preliminary meeting the Defense Department because Defense is concerned with weapons and Labor because manpower is involved there, and Commerce because, at that time, the weather bureau was part of their story and prevailing winds and the like are very important in the dissemination of nuclear gases. We had to give consideration to foreign approaches and development, and we needed someone from the State Department.



And the legal questions called for the Department of Justice. It's just the simple fact that you can never isolate a single question. It has the need of consideration from many departments or you're just going to be trampling the same ground many, many times over. And we'd have a meeting on that or two meetings or five meetings, if necessary, before we had the Cabinet meeting. It might take a week, it might take five weeks or so to develop this to the point of being ready for the Cabinet. But when it was there, we knew where everybody stood. A position paper would be given out in advance of the meetings so the President could see it and the other members could see it and the minority views, if there was a point of view or if we didn't quite come to a decision among the groups, all the points of view were set forth. I had a staff to work with me, and it was a brand new thing. But at least it brought some order.

Now that gives you an idea of some of the things we put on. It doesn't seem very original at this moment, but the first time that the budget of the Department of HEW was presented, and I remember how important it was to Secretary Hobby and to Under Secretary Nelson Rockefeller, and they brought in a young man who did very well and got himself a fine reputation by helping in the presentation with charts. We never had charts at a Cabinet meeting before. But they brought forth their budget and this young man was--oh, dear me, it'll come to me in short order--but he's done



very well in government and the law after that. He's such a good friend of mine that how dare I forget his name! But I did it. I had it on the tip of my tongue--it'll come back. But the presentation was unusual, it was revolutionary. And here was Agriculture sitting there listening to HEW. But President Eisenhower wanted that. We had discussed it beforehand. Because when he got through, he said, "That program, ladies and gentlemen must be sold by all of you even if you don't think you have an interest in this. I expect this team to go out and make their influence felt. We have educators here. We have top lay leadership." We had, of course, Dulles and [Ezra Taft] Benson on the Mormon side and others who felt that way, I think, on the Methodist side--Arthur Flemming. It was a very interesting picture. And he said you should make speeches and that was something that was done thereafter.

HORROCKS: Wasn't that one of the major points of the Cabinet Secretariat, that it was not just a decision-making body--it was really a way for the President to educate the executive branch in why a decision was made and what was expected of them.

RABB: You have said it very well. It's one of the reasons. It was a decision-making body because very often the President would say, "Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take a vote on this." And he would have a vote. And if there's any dissension, the President made himself clear in front of everybody else that he was against it. And then it was known that he was against it



and maybe he didn't have to fight for it the same way the others did. But, if you will read [Harold] Ickes' book on the cabinet of FDR, it was divide and rule. And you would find that Roosevelt would set Ickes and Jesse Jones for example on [Henry] Wallace. And they would fight him and then later on when Wallace was fighting to get an agricultural program through, they would be going behind his back and saying to the President, "Now, don't worry about that. Don't take it seriously. We know this is wrong." And that couldn't be the case here. A vote was taken or you expressed yourself with an implied vote, in effect, in many instances. And that was it. They said what they wanted to.

Talk about votes--one of the most dramatic was the one with Senator Case of South Dakota, Francis Case, when he made the charge about the gas and the lobbying and corruption. And the President said, "Let me have your vote everybody." And everyone was put on the spot. They had to each one individually tell what they thought. Anyway I think the President sided completely opposite to what any of the others had said and just ruled out as you would now know that he would do very quickly any attempt to try to gloss over something that would look like we were consorting with evil.

There was decision making. It was an educative process. It was an educative process for the agencies and with the departments as you have pointed out. It was an education in working



together with big men, all of whom were prima donnas and who were accustomed to going off on their own. And finally it was to be a process of education for the public and these people were to take their roles.

I remember on the agricultural fight, because Benson always had a hard time. One time Lodge was sent out on that to the U.N. to speak on a phase of it. I was sent out to Purdue to take up the role when no one else would really go out there in farm country--go and make the cause. But others around there spoke and fought. It was a very, very interesting process.

HORROCKS: How literally should a historian take the statement about voting in cabinet meetings and decision making?



RABB: It's a deliberative body to aid and assist the President. It was done very, very infrequently. But what I'm trying to say to you is: Occasionally he said, "How many favor, how many don't? But that was a very rare thing. It wasn't intended to be a regular part of this process. Oh, no, no. If I gave that impression, it's wrong. But I think really what I meant to say was: If you've got anything to say after we've made this decision, you say it now or in effect vote for it because this is what we're going to do.

Now, let me just tell you about a couple of other phases of this that are terribly interesting to me and were quite unique. The question came up very early in the game when I came in: Do we take minutes, or do we not take minutes? I made the decision on that. It became very clear to me quickly that to take down verbatim statements of everybody there would be about the most dangerous thing that could happen. You have men there who had a feeling that they were a part of history, that they were men of stature--whether anyone else thought so, they did. And they were accustomed to posing in many instances, and I don't mean for them--it's with all--it's with people in every form of activity--not only the theater or business or the rest of it. A man who is up front has got to make a presentation and so they who are Cabinet members and holding the reins of government have a strong feeling that this was an important thing for them to do. They did just that. They would have made statements, and they would have made statements not to help the President, and this is the point I'm making, but to posture for and get golden words in there that would look good twenty years from that date when historians would get to it. So we went against it and the President was very much in favor of following that. We did have minutes and we never had any problem about the minutes. They were not full-blown minutes of--

[Interruption]



HORROCKS: We were talking just now about whether or not minutes were kept at the Cabinet meetings and what type of minutes.

RABB: They were minutes that just really put down the essence of what was being said and discussed. And what we did afterwards was to take these minutes and to, in a sense, circulate them. It was a brief statement of what had developed there.

HORROCKS: Would these be called records of decisions?

RABB: Yes, records of decisions. But the minutes in effect were not the kind of minutes that were lengthy and very full, there's much more of decision or what was taken up and what disposition was made of an item. I had at that time Brad--

HORROCKS: Patterson?

RABB: --Patterson, as one of my assistants and he would take care of the record-making part of it afterwards. Now, we would have, as I pointed out on the machinery, meetings that I'd chair or I would watch and we would have a chairman, possibly an under secretary or the head of an agency or the number two man or three man in an outfit, the one who was really responsible, could help shape it up. When we were in there we took down brief notes on what took place. Nothing that would make these people say, "Now, if I say the wrong thing, I'm going to be held accountable a long



time from now." The President had to be informed and the only way he could be informed was for someone to speak very freely which, of course, it brings up the reason that taping without someone knowing about may have solved part of this problem I'm talking about, but it really wasn't fair. If people had the idea they're being taped, they would have talked altogether differently, which is exactly the point that I'm making over here. But it shouldn't be taped on any side, and that is a sermon which we don't have to discuss at this moment, but we did have decisions taken up. Then when the meeting was over, we had the Sub-Cabinet, and the Sub-Cabinet or the junior cabinet, depending upon what you wanted to call it, was composed of the young leadership, generally, in a department of the men sitting around the Cabinet table. For example, it could be an under secretary, an assistant secretary, or the right arm of a member of the Cabinet. But you could be assured that those that were selected were the ones that could be talked to very confidentially by the members of the Cabinet. They just were not going to entrust that job to somebody else, and I'll tell you why. They were given all the secret material that came out in the Cabinet room, generally--I won't say everything. But I would give a summary to those that were seated around there.

It was interesting. Brownell's selection, for example, was John Lindsay, and he was not an assistant attorney general but he was his assistant. There were several people who became congressmen, governors, who were in that group later on. It was an elite group



in that sense; they understood they were getting something that no one else would get. And they were told what had come out of the Cabinet meeting, what action would have to be taken, and who was responsible for the action. And that's the way we kept the matters of the discussion from just being taken up, discussed, and put aside and forgotten, because later on--maybe once every three months -- I would come up with a record sheet and read it to everybody. And it was really a scorecard that would tell the President that "Secretary X" had been entrusted with six decisions to carry out, none of them had been handled, none of them had been acted upon. Of course, that would be the worst thing, and to be there with his peers, to have his secretary of a department sit there before his peers and hear that one thing he didn't do was anything was a very, very sad commentary. I respectfully submit to you that that had a great effect and they loved to hear that there was action. So the men that were over there worked it out. It was a beautiful set up and it worked very well.

And we had other little organizations on that. There was an under secretary's club for a while. It was to give a feeling of cohesion and feeling and warmth, and there were even social affairs that came out of it. And these are things that people don't understand about the Eisenhower regime. It was why it was successful. Eisenhower did see to it that his people were brought in and made a part of the entire operation.



HORROCKS: How were things put on the agenda? How did you decide what you wanted to discuss?

RABB: I would hear from the staff, from Sherman Adams, or General [Wilton] Persons that something should go on the agenda. The President when I saw him might say, "I would like this." It might be something that was unfinished from the previous meeting and that everyone felt should go on the next agenda. And emergency items could always come up without previous consideration; so there was flexibility. It wasn't just a question of waiting for something to come up. And now I'd better make a confession to you: We occasionally stirred up a little bit on this. Let me give you an example of this. The idea was, if there was a real problem--and I had a very good one was something that today doesn't mean anything, but we called it the numbers game -- and it was in the front pages all over town. It dealt with a number of communist card holders, or those that are in the government, or those that had any perversions, or I don't know what it was. It was really an outgrowth of, in a sense, of the McCarthy period though they're not directly related to it. It was a count on this thing, and it was given out. Now that had to come up and we got into a lot of trouble on it. That was always pushed under the table by the Department of Justice, generally by [William P.] Rogers at that time. Didn't like it to



come out. Oh, I understand that. It was nothing--this is not being difficult with him. And I would see that Phillip Young, who had the Civil Service Commission, seemed suddenly to take on this post and to carry it when he wasn't even involved in it in any way. When the numbers had come out from J. Edgar Hoover and the Department of Justice and it became too hot to handle, suddenly Mr. Phillip Young--who was a wonderful man and would take on some of these responsibilities--found himself with them. And I felt that was an item for the Cabinet. That I'd discuss it and maybe they'd push it aside and I'd lose it and we might talk it over with the staff. This is the way in which it would be done. But other times I saw too that items that I thought should get up there, should get up there. But this pusing under the rug is not an Eisenhower problem; it belongs to everybody. It belongs to you and to me. We like to sweep out of our minds or out of our daily life those things--maybe this pile of papers I have on my desk--the ones on the bottom are the most important-- I just want to get them away where I don't look at them. And so it is with others. I don't want to look bad to everybody. You don't. They didn't. And so it has been since time immemorial with people who are working with others -- they don't like to have their deficiencies and weaknesses exposed.

An other one that I can give you--here's an example of something that came up. It's a little far-fetched, but it's the



kind of imaginative thing that you would see. At one point in the mess--the mess not being anything that we did, but where we ate at the White House--Clare Booth Luce, I think, was then visiting from Italy and Fred [Joseph] Dodge, who was a very admirable, capable man heading the budget, had discussed with me the possibility--this was at a little later date, after Dodge had left his role there--but had been given some other assignments. And we sat down and suddenly we were talking and discussion came on the question of how the world was facing this tremendous crisis of not enough water in the world, not enough fresh water in the world and how desert lands could be made to bloom again. And as we think of energy as the problem today, this began to look like one at that time. So when it was brought up and I said, "Why don't we put it on the Cabinet? Why don't we make it a Manhattan Project?" And as the talk developed, we got into the middle of it--why don't we have--

[Interruption]

RABB: --the question of the saline waters problem. We really felt that maybe it should be a Manhattan Project, maybe that it would be good to work it up quietly with no one being aware of it and then President Eisenhower going before the U.N. and saying to the world: Here's what I'm giving you. Here is our research. Here is how we can develop in these vast desert lands



with so much of the world completely lacking in sufficient water-- the deserts of Australia, of the Arab world, of Africa, the Sahara, in the United States, down in South America and everywhere--how effective it can be if we let this go to the world and we give it to you. And we thought that was great and it went on the agenda. I presented it to President Eisenhower; he liked it and it went on the agenda. [Fred] Seaton who was a very good friend of mine at the Department of Interior suddenly saw that this was a threat to him. But he was much too bright to take it on head-on, and he merely said, "You know a division of saline waters and they've been working on this and I think before we do anything we should let that department work on this." And, of course, that was the kiss of death because the department is small and didn't have the punch that would have been given by a total project. And the President said, "Fine." The net result of it was that the same thing was carried on through the division of saline waters with [Lyndon] Johnson. Money went out to many large companies. The world got it without us getting any credit for it. And we missed an opportunity, I feel. But that's part of how things can be good or bad in a Cabinet meeting, but at least we had a way of trying to get it up there before everybody.



HORROCKS: Did you clear agenda items with Cabinet members before Cabinet meetings?

RABB: Oh, yes, yes. We would even have meetings on it if it really affected them. When I say I cleared it, I would say this is the agenda and is there anything you want to say about this. Have you anything you want to put on? Oh, yes, they were involved-- anything you want to put on? I would never say is there anything you want to take off? [Laughter] But if they felt strongly enough they would either point blank say take it off, we're not ready for it, or we're going to have this worked out. But they had to give me some proof on this because I had to show it to the President. I did have a wallop there because the President was backing me all the way; this was the type of thing he wanted. And frankly, I think it was one of his most successful devices, and it wasn't just a device. It was a means of making a team work together, and people have got to look at it that way.

He had Cabinet Papers. It was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened. Today we have commissions that involve the President, the executive body, the Congress and the public, and the papers have no affect at all. But when we put out a Cabinet Paper on farm problems or on foreign matters, whatever the subject might be, the word Cabinet Paper had a magic to it. Today they go in for things like--oh, what are these--what are the several bodies they have? They even escape my mind. And this isn't senility. The several bodies that they have--the Domestic Council--Public doesn't know anything about a domestic council, and their word doesn't mean anything. But it's almost

like coming from on high to have a Cabinet Paper say this is the story. We had a very, very effective program.

HORROCKS: What was the relationship between the Cabinet Secretariat and the Staff Secretariat?

RABB: We would clear with each other--I wouldn't--if we had to make a graph, many of the things I did I would clear with the Staff Secretariat. This one I didn't. You see, the Cabinet matters I was alongside--but we worked very well. There was never any problem on it. I never even thought of it until this moment you mentioned it.

HORROCKS: Initially, wasn't there some consideration at least by Carter Burgess, who helped set up the--



RABB: Oh, I'm sorry. How did it come about? It was Carter--now that isn't fair of me. Carter Burgess did come up with a plan that what would help all of this would be something like this. We improved on it, but Carter Burgess, oh, yes, he deserves a great vote of thanks and I did not mean to bury a vital contribution and a deserved word, because he did a great job on that one.

HORROCKS: Did relations between the Cabinet and staff secretariats change at all between say Paul Carroll and then when Andrew Goodpaster took over?

RABB: They were, for me, two of the most beautiful men that I have ever, ever worked with. And when I said to you a little earlier that I was surprised about the--

[Interruption]

General Carroll and General Goodpaster were two of the most effective staff secretaries that I have ever seen. And the relationship that I had with them was such, as I pointed out a moment ago. When you asked me what we cleared with each other, it was the first time I had even thought about the fact that there probably should have been a relationship so smooth was our actual workings together.

HORROCKS: Were you really separate then or were things just so informal?

RABB: I was a member of the staff, but my actual workings on this were apart as it were, because I was part of the White House grouping.

HORROCKS: Now, Arthur Minnich was with the Staff Secretariat.

RABB: Right.

HORROCKS: --Now did he take minutes of Cabinet meetings? Was there some sort of problem with that? I've got the impression that he did take minutes of Cabinet meetings and that the Cabinet secretariat got blamed for that.



RABB: No, I know what your talking about. You are now talking about the famous [Robert J.] Donovan book. By the way, I did hear from John Eisenhower a few days ago who told me about making an issue of this with PI--Political whatever that is--it's a political annual--maybe it's PA. They recorded a meeting at which a well-known political scientist mentioned the fact that Cabinet minutes were taken before the Donovan incident and was stopped afterwards. And Eisenhower wrote in a letter saying this was not true. And then he came to me and I had to say that I had to back him up completely, that we never stopped taking our minutes. Our minutes were never changed in substance.

The Donovan book, and this is now off the general subject, the Donovan book was authorized not by me--that is the releasing of the information--it was one of these things that is equivalent I gather in a different way to the New York Times story that was given to [John] Hersey by President Ford. They want an airing of some things: Follow me around for a day and hear and see what I have to say, to try to give a human interest element to this, to give life to the work in the White House and not have everyone think it's just a sheer machine. That is what we're dealing with and working with over here, not a machine but flesh and blood. It's an entirely different type of thing. And the Cabinet minutes-- I was not responsible for it, obviously, and poor Minnich, who did work directly under Sherman Adams, was told to show some of the



things that have taken place. And many of the other people in the place were told to talk. I think I was told to tell about the operation of that, about some of the things we did in the civil rights field, what we did on the humanitarian field, some of the other matters that I handled. So I say that many of us, but I don't remember, I never showed any minutes to anybody. And he didn't take our minutes. He was using our decisions maybe. I don't know what he showed them. I have no idea.

HORROCKS: He wasn't keeping his own that you know of either?

RABB: No, no, no. This was kept by me, and in the background I had Brad Patterson taking a few notes. Sometimes and some maybe Gretchen Stewart, my secretary, I might plant her in the back just to take down a few words, but never verbatim.

HORROCKS: Were you able or did you use the power to set the agenda to promote civil rights issues?

RABB: No, never did. Civil rights was a post that fell to me because nobody else dared take it on. And I don't know that I dared take it on--I was told to so I did it. But I can tell you, I didn't seek that one and I wasn't brought on for civil rights, brought on to the White House. Because President Eisenhower always felt that there shouldn't be ethnic divisions in that



sense that you should have a special group for Italians and another one for Hawaiians and another one for the Japanese, but that the problem of one group was the problem of all and that there were special aspects of it. Let's drag it out. You know it doesn't quite work out that way in practice and when we had one or two real upheavals such as the famous [Adam Clayton] Powell--have you ever heard that one, that's a great story -- and that's how I got it. I got it because General Persons, who had charge of the Congress with Bryce Harlow and Gerry Morgan and [I. Jack] Martin, didn't want his people tainted with that. They'd never give up one bit of their jurisdiction, they're not different than anybody else; they wouldn't give it up. But that one--they were terribly happy to give it up to me--give me the business of getting more Italian refugees or immigrants into the United States because the President wanted it. So I grew into this job, but I never brought it up in the Cabinet. Occasionally the subject came up and I became a great expert in it. I really wasn't a great expert, but after a while they began to think I was. I had some success.

HORROCKS: You mentioned earlier--this is beyond the secretariat--that there's a very interesting story behind that Refugee Relief Act of '53.

RABB: Wasn't that told on the--



HORROCKS: I don't think they got to it.

RABB: It's one of the most fascinating stories. Well, let me try to give it to you fairly quickly, but it's a great story. Maybe sometime we could fill it in with more detail.

I got some of the flaps. Powell, for example, was somebody they didn't know how to tackle. Civil rights had not--not civil rights, but the black question, hadn't come to a head the way it did later on. I think Eisenhower was fabulous on this field. He never believed in making political capital of it. (And I would suggest that you read the accounts on it or even listen to what I could say--but I think it's very difficult to listen to me--at least I think that's one of the greatest punishments that could be conferred on anybody. So I don't want to tell you to really listen to me, but the story is a good one.) We were talking now of 1951--early in 1951, the new administration is underway and--

HORROCKS: 1953?



RABB: I'm sorry--1953--both these were in that early period that I mentioned, but this one now on the refugee question. Queen Juliana, [of the Netherlands] Prime Minister De Gasperi of Italy, both begged the President to help them. She had the Indonesian question with so many people being driven out of there and many of them who were loyal to her and, with the new regime coming in,

were having a terrible time--De Gasperi was having an extraordinary economic problem. The threat from the communist takeover was very, very much part of those days and De Gasperi was a great statesman. They got the President and persuaded him that something should be done. And so he came along and said, "I want three hundred and forty thousand--twenty thousand or forty thousand--refugees and immigrants." (There's a difference between the two), but it was to have admitted to the United States--and "I'd like to have the visas for them." I had nothing to do with it--didn't touch it at all. It went over to General Persons, he was dealing with it. With [Herman] Welker, with [Pat] McCarran, with [John] McClellan, with [William E.] Jenner-- oh, you go through the list and it was an impossible list from the point of view of getting this one over, including a new senator from Utah--[Arthur] Watkins, who was the only vote against the Korean issue.

HORROCKS: I didn't know that.

RABB: Well, it was a very, very tough one. [Everett] Dirksen was there--this was the Taft leader. There was a John Marshall Butler. If you've ever seen a Judiciary Committee like this one ever before. It was--it was impossible. And General Persons was very generous. And he and Adams got together and first tried to get Paul Hoffman and Johnson to head a citizen's committee--Johnson of the movie picture industry--and that fell through; it was too



much work. They'd have to organize people all over the country, bring them together.

Finally, as I say, he was very generous and abdicating and the next thing I knew I had it! And I just about knew that I was about indulging in my final days in that place, because I could do whatever I want, I could go in there and work with them, but don't bring our people in there or we would lose a lot, an awful lot of impact. So I took it over; I don't know whether you knew, I did it. And this is how the thing went. I took a look at that committee and I really gulped--not once but about ten times--this was absolutely in the Senate the most difficult committee you could gather and in the House you had [Francis E.] Walter. I took a look at the fact that during the convention, Republican convention, Truman on the McCarran bill had his veto overthrown and he had a largely Democratic Congress, House and Senate with him. That is he'd vetoed it, the Walter-McCarran Bill, and it went through. We didn't have that kind of a majority. We had an entirely different story. We had real problems. I really knew this was a very difficult thing but, I started off. And it was really a one man show at that point. But I had the encouragement of President Eisenhower and I would say, of General Carroll at that point as I later had it from--. And Adams was always terrific--I must pay my tribute to Sherman Adams. This was one of the fairest, and they knew I had a rough one. He said,



"You don't have to get this done yesterday. You can get it done an hour from now," [Laughter] which meant that I had enough time to do it. But he understood. There was something about him.

And I went in, and this was the first time that someone could see anybody they wanted to see and not have to account directly for every visit to the Senate and House. All right, let's go at it. The vote was overwhelmingly against this. So the first thing that I did was to go over to see Senator McCarran who controlled the committee and was on very close terms with the Republicans and Democrats. [James] Eastland was on that committee. You go through the committee--it was a very, very rough committee. The ones in favor--[Robert C.] Hendrickson, from New Jersey.--I think the senator from Missouri--his name escapes me at the moment, Democrat--

HORROCKS: Symington?



RABB: His name escapes me, but it's been so long since I've thought about this. He's died long ago, and it's not a familiar name [Thomas C. Hennings], he was in favor of--but I took a look at them. They had [William] Langer on their committee, certainly I had that vote. But that was a good vote, I thought, and I went at it. The first thing I did was I might as well meet this head-on. What do you do? You meet it head-on.

[Interruption]

HORROCKS: You're talking about going directly to the committee and facing them squarely with this problem.

RABB: But I thought that the thing to do was to see the key man-- McCarran. While he was not the chairman, if I remember correctly, there was a one vote Republican majority in this Senate. He, nevertheless, was still the moving figure in there. Watkins was the chairman of the committee. But I decided I'd go to see him. He was an old friend. I had known him a long, long time. Eva Adams brought me in, and I said to her, "I'd appreciate seeing him." And I told her what I had in mind and when she said, "Oh, Max, this is murder." [Laughter] Well, I went to him and he said, "Well, Max, what do you want?"

And I said, "Senator, the President of the United States would like very much to have your support on a bill to admit three hundred and twenty thousand immigrants."

And he said, "Stop. Max," he said, "I want to tell you, he won't get that, he won't get that. He won't even get it out of the Senate and what is more, he's not going to get it out of the committee."

I said, "Senator, I've been given a task," and I said it in just about as straight a way as I could, "I've been given a mission; I was told to get your vote. I'm sorry you can't do it. I'll just have to report to him that it can't be done."



And I heard him laughing as I walked out the door. It was about as innocent a pose as I could have, and frankly it wasn't innocent. I was beaten over the head, but I just did that.

So the next thing I did was to go and see Watkins--saw Dirksen. And Dirksen was then on the outs with the President. It wasn't they were on the outs, he couldn't get in. And I was the means of bringing Dirksen together with the President, and he was pleased about it. I tell you--you know their relationship became so fantastic later on, but this gave him the opportunity--first thing he'd been asked by the President to do. And he said, "Max, I'll do it." And he was against it. He had always voted against it. So I had one vote, but I didn't say anything to anybody.

I then went to see John Marshall Butler--no, Watkins. And I had a long tussle with him. We ended up--he just said, "How can I do this? This is against my principles. I don't believe in this." And I let him go on.

I said, "Senator, the President of the United States is asking you to do it. What an opportunity for you to begin to demonstrate the statesmanship that can come out of a Congress where there is such a slim majority. What it would mean to the nation to know that you're flexible, that you're willing to make this kind of a push."



And he said, "Max, I don't want to do this. I'm not going to do it"--no it was "Mr. Rabb" then because I didn't even know him.

I said, "I'd like you to do it."

I didn't tell him that the President at that time said, "I can't talk to him. I don't want to see him. I'm afraid of him. I won't even see him for breakfast."

Anyway, I've arranged a breakfast, and he went in to see him afterwards, but he said, "I'll do it."

So I had two votes and I had the chairman--on the difficult ones. I went to see John Marshall Butler. And John Marshall Butler said, "How can I do it?" This is certainly the closest disciple of McCarthy in the whole picture. "How am I going to do it? How am I going to leave these people, my friends?"

I said, "You're dealing with a seaport"--I found out, I immediately sensed that the maritime was the most important thing-- "why don't you do something good over here and you know you're dealing with people that are coming out of a port. We can bring the attention that maritime affairs are terribly important. For heaven sakes this is a good way for you." And I got him, I got him. He said, "Don't say anything to anybody, don't say anything to anybody!" But I had the next vote.

And I then figured, just if I had Langer. So I went to the easiest one. I had the game, I figured. I went to see Senator Langer. He was an old friend. And he use to chew on a cigar with cellophane on it. I came in to see him, and he said, "Good to see you, Max."



I said, "I'm very happy to see you, Senator." I told him what I wanted and then I smiled--this was easy.

He said, "The answer is no." I almost dropped through the floor.

I said, "You, the leader of the liberal world, you can't do that to us."

And then he told me, he said, "I can't, can't I. I certainly will. The President had a bridge to dedicate between North and South Dakota and they deliberately left me out. They asked all the other senators, they asked the other governors. I was not asked."

"Oh," I said, "Senator, now that you've told me this story--" because he was a man that if I had to sum it up--if you got him in a corner, he'd fight to get back at you and knew nothing except how to damage you--let him out of the corner. And I just said, "Senator, you're absolutely right. There is no question that you're right. And I have no way to give you any kind of persuasive answer." I said, "But don't blame the President of the United States. He doesn't realize this--it's his aides who have done this. And they're stupid and terrible to have even done this with a senator like you, and that doesn't make any sense. It's wrong, but he's got to take the blame. The President has got to take the blame. All I can tell you is, it's a great disappointment to me because your vote is all important."



He said, "I can't--just can't do it."

I said, "All right, don't do it." And I said, "Senator, it means my job--I'm finished. But all I can say is I at least went out with a cause that was correct, because they have no right to ask you for something like this and have done that to you. All right, I want to say good-bye to you and maybe I'm finished here in Washington," and I said good-bye and I turned around and I started to go through the door.

"Max, come back here." He said, "O.K." He says, "I'll go with you. How can I permit you to go alone."

I had it.

So the meeting was called and McCarran was out in Nevada. He didn't care about that meeting. This one--this was all--they voted it. And at that meeting there was a tremendous fight between Welker, who eventually became my friend. Jenner, who was friendly with me but couldn't vote for this type of thing, but Welker--and there was a fist fight. It was in all the newspapers--between Welker and Dirksen. They really went--you know, they separated them. It wasn't just that. I think he called me--he said, "You've listened to that damn Jew, Rabb"--this was my friend--Welker and I really wound up as great friends. I didn't see him at all at that point, but he'd been getting it. Oh, this was in the newspapers. Hit the headlines at the time. And a note came back--telegram--"Recast the meeting, new meeting," from McCarran,



"I will be there." And he went there and got licked anyway, and it was all over. It went to the House, and I got it passed Walter. And I did all the work--dirty work--both McCarran and Walter said that you'd better get Rabb out of there. So that's how Scott McLeod, who likewise is one of my oldest friends because [Styles] Bridges was a great friend of mine--used to be with him--and we got along fine. But he was named by Walter to be the coordinator after that. Then the legislative people came and made the compromise. But we beat that. That's the story on it.

O.K. Now, I've got to get going.

