

**J. ROBERT VASTINE**

**Staff Director, Senate Republican Conference**

**1985-1991**

Oral History Interviews  
August 27 to October 25, 1993

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, DC

## Deed of Gift

I, J. Robert Vastine, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews between August 27 and October 25, 1993.

It is my desire that these transcripts remain sealed until January 3, 2001, and the tapes for an additional fifty years, unless otherwise opened by myself. After those dates, I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the transcripts and tapes in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcripts at the Library of Congress, National Archives, Senate Library, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

---

J. Robert Vastine

---

Accepted on behalf of the  
Senate Historical Office by:

---

Richard A. Baker

---

## Table of Contents

Preface

Interview #1: Early Years With Tom Curtis .....	1
Interview #2: From the House to the Senate .....	36
Interview #3: The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act .....	64
Interview #4: The View from the Executive Branch .....	85
Interview #5: The Gang of Six .....	110
Interview #6: The Senate Republican Conference .....	134
Interview #7: Antennas on the Roof .....	156
Interview #8: Senators and the Media .....	174
Interview #9: Leaving the Republican Conference .....	193
Index .....	216

## Preface

A microwave antenna satellite dish appeared on the roof of the Hart Senate Office Building in 1985. The antenna was linked to the Senate Republican Conference's offices, which included studio and field cameras, editing rooms, a control room, a studio, and staff members who transmitted video feed to television stations across the country, via satellite. Conference facilities also sponsored daily calls to radio stations in each state, offering "actualities" of Republican senators' comments on the day's news. These technological innovations were the work of J. Robert Vastine, who served as staff director of the Conference from 1985 to 1991.

Traditionally, the Republican Conference had convened each Congress to elect party leaders and occasionally to provide a forum for Republican senators. While the Senate Democratic floor leader also served as chairman of the Democratic conference and of its policy committee, Senate Republicans elected separate floor leaders, conferences chairs, and policy committee chairs. Operating separately from the floor leadership, the Conference staff had devoted much of its attention to producing commentary for Republican senators to submit for publication in newspaper "op-ed" pages. Vastine, however, shifted the Conference's focus to broadcast media and tried to operate like a commercial TV news bureau, quick to respond to current circumstances and to the needs of the Republican senators to reach audiences in their home states.

Although these services encountered some initial resistance from metropolitan television and radio stations, they were welcomed by smaller market stations. Slowly, the metropolitan stations began using the Conference's "video press releases." Similarly, the younger Republican senators were the quickest to adopt to the new opportunities that these media innovations offered, and eventually most Senate Republicans and their press secretaries came to appreciate the new services. Senate Democrats eventually followed suit by establishing their own studio facilities.

Born in Danville, Pennsylvania, on November 12, 1937, and raised in nearby Shamokin, Pennsylvania, John Robert Vastine, Jr., attended local public schools and graduated from the Mercersburg Academy. He received his B.A. from Haverford College, and an M.A. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. In 1965 he joined the staff of Missouri Republican Representative Thomas B. Curtis as an economic advisor. A specialist in international trade policy, Vastine co-authored with Representative Curtis *The Kennedy Round and the Future of the American Trade* (Praeger, 1971).

When Curtis lost his race for the Senate in 1968, Vastine served as Washington representative of the Emergency Committee for American Trade, and for CPC International, Inc. In 1971, Illinois Republican Senator Charles Percy appointed Vastine as minority staff director of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. In that position, he became one of the architects of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974, which established the modern role of Congress in the budgetary process. From 1975 to 1977, in the Ford Administration, Vastine served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury for international Trade and Raw Materials. After Gerald Ford lost the election of 1976, Vastine became a fellow at the Institute of Politics of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard University, and later moved to California as president of the Alliance for American Innovation, and a founder of the Washington Pacific Group, a consulting firm.

Bob Vastine returned to Washington in 1982 as legislative director of Rhode Island Republican Senator John Chafee. When Chafee became chairman of the Republican Conference in 1985, he appointed Vastine as the Conference's staff director. On November 13, 1990, Mississippi Senator Thad Cochran, a conservative, defeated the more liberal Senator Chafee as Conference chairman, by a vote of 22 to 21. Leaving the Senate Republican Conference, Vastine was appointed as the vice president for congressional affairs of the Oversight Board of the Resolution Trust Corporation. In 1993 he became president of the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute, and in 1999 president of the Coalition of Service Industries.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. He has published articles on American political history and oral history, including "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *Press Gallery, Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991), and *The Young Oxford Companion to the Congress of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1993). For the Senate, he wrote *A History of the United States Senate Policy Committee, 1947-1997* (Government Printing Office, 1997) and co-edited the *Minutes of the Senate Republican Conference, 1911-1964* (Government Printing Office, 1999). A former president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

*Transcribed by* Elizabeth J. Strannigan