

# Jackson Advice to a Political Candidate

*John Q. Barrett\**

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Robert H. Jackson was interested in and connected to politics for his entire life. Jackson was, like his ancestors, a Democrat. In his youth, he spoke and worked in Chautauqua County in western New York State for presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson. Jackson later became, for a time, his party's county chairman. Through Democratic Party politics in New York State, Jackson became acquainted with "Frank" Roosevelt, James A. Farley, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. and others who later brought Jackson into national government and advanced his career. Jackson worked actively for Franklin D. Roosevelt's elections as New York governor in 1928 and 1930 and his presidential elections in 1932 and thereafter.

During Jackson's Washington service (1934-1941) in the Roosevelt administration, he was very much in politics. He dealt constantly with (other) politicians, became a friend to many of them, and observed all of politics from the inside. Jackson came close to running for political office a few times. In the mid-1930s, he considered running for state judicial office, including the New York Court of Appeals. In early 1938, he flirted with a New York gubernatorial candidacy. By 1940, he was a national figure and a leading presidential prospect—of course based on the assumption, which proved incorrect, that the Democratic Party would need a new presidential candidate that year to succeed the retiring FDR.

In the end, Robert Jackson never ran for elective office. In 1941, he was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States. Four years later, he was in Nuremberg prosecuting the principal Nazi war criminals.

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In Nuremberg, Justice Jackson met Jacqueline Cochran, the world famous American aviatrix.<sup>1</sup> She was covering the Nuremberg trial for *Liberty* magazine, which was owned by her husband, businessman Floyd B. Odlum, with whom Jackson was already acquainted. The Cochran/Odlums soon became friends with Bob and Irene Jackson. Irene flew often with Jackie. Each couple hosted the other in its home (or, in the Odlums' case, their homes).

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In the early 1950s, Jackie Cochran discussed with Bob Jackson the prospect that she would run for Congress from the Riverside County, California, district where she and Floyd had a desert ranch. I approximately late 1951, Jackson dictated, probably edited and then sent Jackie a typed, unsigned, undated memorandum giving advice to the prospective politician. Much of it is still relevant, and to more than House races:

MEMORANDUM

*Jim Farley used to say, "In politics nothing just happens." It seems that success depends on an intelligent plan, courageously adhered to, and one which does not omit consideration of weaknesses as well as strengths of one's position.*

*First, to consider the dangers. It would be fatal to your campaign to be regarded as an absentee from your district. That is an idea that could be subtly cultivated. Washington is full of examples of men who were once powerful and carried their districts with ease, who have been retired simply because they spent so much time in Washington that their district[s] regarded them as foreigners. You simply must so completely identify yourself in your district that when they think of you, they think of you as one of themselves and not as a transient.*

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<sup>1</sup> For a video biography of Jacqueline Cochrane, visit <http://videos.howstuffworks.com/discovery-turbo/13969-speed-freaks-meet-jackie-cochran-video.htm>.

*Every candidate who has or is related to wealth is always charged with trying to use that advantage to carry the election. The charge is easy to make and difficult to overcome, for the more publicity, etc. that is resorted to in answering the charge, the more the charge seems to be proving itself. Your candidacy simply must start at the “grass roots” and remain that kind of a campaign, with no machinery in sight. This means that it must largely be the work of volunteers.*

*Volunteers present special dangers of their own. Most of them have their own interests to promote rather than the general interest and expect to use the campaign as their own. A mistake by one of one’s own supporters is ten times as serious as an attack from one’s enemies. Remember, Dr. Burchard, who defeated James G. Blaine for President by his famous speech against “rum, Romanism and rebellion,” was Blaine’s friend—not his enemy. Moreover, it is easier to get these special-interest people started than it is to get them stopped, and easier to get tied to them than it is to get loose. History is full of instances in which candidates had to repudiate some of their supporters who were running away with the campaign, only to find it very embarrassing and sometimes fatal.*

*An intelligent plan for [a] campaign can only be based on either the closest knowledge or an intense study of the district. The study itself should be preceded by a plan, but it would include such items as these:*

*(a) What newspapers are published in the district and what outside papers are read there. Who controls them and how. What radio stations are local or are listened to particularly. With what, if any, special interests are each of these means of communication identified. What are their biases in politics.*

*(b) What are the economic interests of the district. A Congressman is supposed to represent the general interest of the district. But that can be ascertained only by the aggregate of special interests or the balance of special*

*interests. For example, one end of the district might produce what the other end consumed, such as milk which is produced in upstate New York and consumed in New York City. While the trade can be advantageous to both ends, it is also possible for a candidate to have both ends against him unless he understands their interests. One needs to know both what the district produces and sells and what it needs and consumes; and where its markets are and what economic ills it suffers from.*

*(c) What employer organizations exist in the district, what is their strength and what is their policy. What labor unions exist and what is their strength; what is their program within the district. What are the relations of each of these organizations to national organizations and how far will they act independently of them.*

*(d) What federal aid goes into the district. This is of 57 varieties. Who gets it and how much, and why.*

*(e) What is the district's special interest in the various federal programs, such as reclamation, agricultural controls, etc., etc.*

*(f) Who are the important personalities and why are they important, and how do they keep their importance. These are the ultimate materials of a campaign. It is people who vote and people who lead voters. It is impossible to take them on their own estimates, but the largest aggregation of them will carry the election. One cannot have some without alienating the others. Do they lead by their influence with labor, with industrialists, with farmers, or with general publicity. The way these ultimates line up makes the assets and liabilities of a candidate.*

*(g) Who can make such a study of your district. Certainly no politician connected with any of the organizations could do it because it is likely to be biased. It is not in the line of any business organization or a public relations job. My guess is that it could best be done by an experienced newspaper man of no particular convictions who*

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*could go into the district as if he were preparing a newspaper article and perhaps could use his material for that purpose.*

*Once this basic data is obtained, the question becomes one of evaluating it and formulating a plan based on it. Until that is done, any commitments to persons or policies is guesswork, and I don't need to tell an aviatrix that guesswork leads to crashes in politics as in aviation.<sup>2</sup>*

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In 1956, two years after Jackson's death, Jacqueline Cochran Odlum did run, as a Republican, for an open House seat. Despite the fact that another of her friends, President Dwight Eisenhower, won landslide reelection that November including victory in California, she lost. The winner was Dalip Singh Saund, the Democratic Party candidate and the first native of India to be elected to the Congress of the United States.

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<sup>2</sup> "Memorandum, no author or date [from Robert H. Jackson to Jacqueline Cochran] (carbon copy), in Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C., Box 241, Folder 1.