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Fish or Cut Bait? Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway

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Abstract

“Our relations with Canada, happily always close, involve more and more the unbreakable ties of strategic interdependence. Both nations now need the St. Lawrence Seaway for security as well as for economic reasons. I urge the Congress promptly to approve our participation and construction.” When President Dwight D. Eisenhower included these sentences in his State of the Union Address in January of 1954, there must have been an almost audible sigh of relief from the thousands of Seaway activists, Congressmen, and lobbyists across the country. The previous year had not been an easy one for supporters of the St. Lawrence Seaway project, but now in 1954 they had the guaranteed support of the most powerful and popular man in the nation.

Keywords

St. Lawrence Seaway, Eisenhower, presidency, president, domestic policy, Canada

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Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway

“Our relations with Canada, happily always close, involve more and more the unbreakable ties of strategic interdependence. Both nations now need the St. Lawrence Seaway for security as well as for economic reasons. I urge the Congress promptly to approve our participation and construction.”¹ When President Dwight D. Eisenhower included these sentences in his State of the Union Address in January of 1954, there must have been an almost audible sigh of relief from the thousands of Seaway activists, Congressmen, and lobbyists across the country. The previous year had not been an easy one for supporters of the St. Lawrence Seaway project, but now in 1954 they had the guaranteed support of the most powerful and popular man in the nation.

“He succeeded where his predecessors had failed,” said historian William Willoughby, “not because he put forth greater effort – he did not – but rather because of” certain “favorable developments.”² This opinion has now become conventional wisdom in the limited field of Seaway scholarship - other factors, none of which had anything to do with Eisenhower, happened to fall into place and allowed the 83rd Congress to slide a bill onto the desk in the Oval Office. Ike, in other words, was lucky.

In reality, luck had little to do with it. The factors traditionally cited by Seaway scholarship as being decisive in pushing the measure through Congress changed the nature of the struggle very little, as they left most of the opposition’s arguments intact and still weighty. In this environment, the only thing that actually changed in the endgame of the Seaway debate was the president, whose support was never guaranteed and always qualified.

Finally, in many of the final details of wrestling the legislation out of the committee and avoiding attempts strangle it, Administration support and leadership proved near essential. Eisenhower was critical to the Seaway bill being moved through Congress and onto his desk not only because of the power the

¹ *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 47.

² William R. Willoughby, “The St. Lawrence Seaway: A Study in Pressure Politics,” *The Queens Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1960): 10.

Administration could wield, but because he was the only factor that was meaningfully different in the 83rd Congress.

Despite this drama, talking about the St. Lawrence Seaway today almost seems an oddity. To those who do not live in upstate New York or New England, it is almost news. In fact, it has taken on a sort of criminal veneer in the recent decades on account of its responsibility for the introduction of invasive species into the Great Lakes and the complete transformation and near destruction of the ecosystem there.³

If the environmental impact of the Seaway were not so disastrous, it would probably have been the success story of a generation. It was built to facilitate travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes and accomplished that goal spectacularly. The various predators taking refuge in the ballast water of ocean ships at once stand both as a symbol of a tragic lesson and as testimony to the enormous success the project has had in fulfilling its objectives.

But in 1954, none of this was on anyone's mind. The St. Lawrence River, a natural waterway that wound its way from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, across the border between upstate New York and Canada, ultimately emptied into Lake Erie down above Pennsylvania. It was a natural highway, having been used to transport people and property since colonial times. Native Americans had traveled on the river before that, but the establishment of Montreal by Jacques Cartier in 1535 marked the true beginning of systematic use of the waterway to facilitate movement of goods and people.⁴ Unfortunately for those trying to exploit this natural resource, the St. Lawrence was also replete with treacherous rapids and concourses.

Starting with the British after the French and Indian War, canals were in an attempt to ease the logistical problems. But these small efforts quickly became obsolete as ships continued to grow in size and both Canada and the United States attempted to combat this trend by digging massive public works canals at the beginning of the 19th century. The United States built the Erie Canal, which aimed to avoid

³ Jeff Alexander, *Pandora's Locks: The Opening of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), xxi-xxii.

⁴ Carleton Mabee, *The Seaway Story* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 8.

the St. Lawrence altogether by connecting the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, and Canada responded with the Welland Canal that circumvented the raging Niagara area rapids and eventually outlasted its American counterpart.⁵

But by the turn of the 20th century, the Erie Canal was obsolete and the Welland Canal was struggling with the traffic demands being piled upon it. Constituencies in both Canada and the United States began to clamor for a larger, more definitive, project that would install locks between the lakes and river and build canals to circumvent the more untenable areas, thus carving the St. Lawrence water system into a bilateral nautical superhighway. The fact that it took until 1954 for any positive action take place should stand ample testimony to how controversial this idea proved too be.

Now, almost all of this is forgotten. Forgotten too is the role played by the man whose signature is on the bill that ended the controversy by authorizing United States participation in the project. Dwight D. Eisenhower is remembered for many achievements; Civil Rights bills, installing the Shah in Iran, the Interstate Highway system, Atoms for Peace, NATO, but the creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway is largely absent from his Administration's resume in the history books.

*

The history of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the twentieth century is one checkered with American delay and dissatisfaction, due in no small part to those powers aligned against it. The opposition came from two main sources; regions who felt their interests endangered by the establishment of such a new competitor for shipping and the businessmen who felt similarly threatened by the cheaper transportation it offered. It was in many ways a strange and powerful symbiosis; Congressmen from the opposed regions

⁵ *Ibid.*,10-18.

were funded and organized by businessmen whose main interests often lay predominately in another area of the country entirely.⁶

The regions' most staunchly opposed to the project were the larger port cities of the east coast and Gulf of Mexico. Congressmen from Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, Louisiana, Delaware, Georgia, New Jersey and the lower New York area were ironclad in their opposition and could typically be counted on to convince or coerce their neutral neighbors into voting against Seaway measures as well.⁷ They formed a powerful bloc in both Houses, convinced that any progress on the Seaway would be harbinger of economic downturn for their region as it would divert ocean traffic to other ports and thus robbing them of valuable capital.

As might be expected, the region that was far-and-away the most pro-Seaway was the Midwest. The Midwestern states were at the time the center of American industry, the greatest manufacturing area in the world. "The Ruhr of Europe is not even a close second," one industry executive exclaimed in the 1953 hearings on the St. Lawrence Seaway before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁸ Construction of the Seaway would allow the Midwestern states to circumvent costly railroad tolls on both imports and exports, as they could simply load ships at ports on the Great Lakes which could then sail straight into the Atlantic Ocean, avoiding the need to carry goods and materials over the Appalachians. This would become especially important with the importation of iron ore.

As stands to reason, the largest business interest against the Seaway was the railroads, welded together into a powerful lobby by the Association of American Railroads. The railroads were fearful of losing revenue from the Midwest, which as the great center of industry provided a significant slice of their annual business and income. Also opposed were Pennsylvania and West Virginia coal mining businesses who worried that if the Seaway were built, hydroelectric power would be a cheaper alternative to their

⁶ Dwight David Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change: 1953-1956, The White House Years* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), 302.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Proposed Presentation Before The Senate Foreign Relations Committee At Hearings On The St. Lawrence Waterway Project," Gruenther, Homer H. Assistant to the Deputy Assistant to the President, 1953-61: Records, 1953-60, Box No. 14, St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project Pamphlets fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

product or that sources fuel from abroad could be taken in for cheaper than their companies could provide. With both of these large private interests came the larger Union lobbies of their workers, who were fearful of losing jobs or pay because of the options the Seaway gave Midwestern industry.⁹ The two interests combined to create a potent force whose efficacy was an indirect cause of what is considered to be the single largest and most influential of the “favorable developments” to emerge 1953.¹⁰ For in 1951, Canada passed the necessary legislation to go ahead and build the St. Lawrence Seaway on her own.¹¹

As mentioned above, the twentieth century was marked by major American delays, “the biggest and longest dragging of feet I have known in my entire career,” said Lester Pearson, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs.¹² At first the project was understandably held up by the economic crunch brought on by World War One. Afterward, it enjoyed forceful support by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a proposed part of his New Deal plan. The idea of a massive public works project fit right in with his ideology for creating jobs while contributing to the strength and well-being of America. “I know of no single project of this nature more important to this country’s future in peace or war,” he wrote in a letter to the House of Representatives, but he still had to watch as the Senate shot down a 1934 treaty with Canada on the matter.¹³ He managed, under pressure from Ottawa, to shepherd through an agreement in 1941 that promised United States participation, but the onset of World War II put a lid on any immediate progress.¹⁴

After the war and under the vigorous leadership of President Harry Truman, the St. Lawrence Seaway again took on a prominent role as key legislation. By this time, however, the opposition was more organized and ready to block measures, no matter how vigorous or strongly endorsed by the president

⁹ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 302; Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 125.

¹⁰ Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 168.

¹¹ Hon. Lionel Chevrier, *The St. Lawrence Seaway* (Toronto: T.H. Best Printing Company Limited, 1959), 48.

¹² Quoted in Mabee, *The Seaway Story*.

¹³ R.B. Willis, “The Saint Lawrence Seaway: Economics for Canadians,” *The Quarterly Review of Commerce* (1941): 268.

¹⁴ Willoughby, “The St. Lawrence Seaway: A Study in Pressure Politics,” 3.

himself. By 1951 Canada was growing restless after watching the United States debate and delay for ten years a supposedly joint project.

Finally, Canada had had enough of United States foot dragging and on December 21, 1951 the Canadian House of Commons passed the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act which not only created the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, a government corporation given the specific task of constructing the St. Lawrence Seaway, but also acted as statement of the Canadian's resolution to go it alone.¹⁵ In January of 1952 an official exchange of notes between Canadian Ambassador Hume Wong and Secretary of State Dean Acheson confirmed Canada's ambitions and won President Truman's reluctant agreement. "The Canadian government is prepared to proceed with the construction of the seaway as soon as appropriate arrangements can be made," Wong wrote to Acheson. In a gesture of patience, though it had certainly been tried enough by this time, he also noted that "such a preparatory step would in no way prejudice the possibility of proceeding with the project on the basis of the 1941 Agreement in the event that Congress should approve that Agreement," effectively providing the United States with an in, provided the recently convened Congress saw fit to pass the legislation.¹⁶

This they did not, despite a forceful speech by Truman later in January in which he bluntly stated the facts of the situation to a stubborn Congress:

The question before the Congress, therefore, no longer is whether the St. Lawrence seaway should be built. The question before the Congress is now whether the United States shall participate in its construction, and thus maintain joint operation and control over this development which is so important to our security and our economic progress.¹⁷

It was no longer a question of *if*, but now the more complicated questions of *when* and *how*. Canada was going to build the Seaway as soon as possible and if the United States did not act, it would not have any voice in the operation of what had been a key economic feature of a large portion of that

¹⁵ The St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act, included in R.R. Baxter ed., *Documents on the St. Lawrence Seaway* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Inc., 1960), 19.

¹⁶ *Exchange of Notes Dated January 11, 1952, on the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project*, in *Message from the President of the United States relative to the Construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project*, 82nd Cong., 2d sess., 1952, H. Doc. No. 337, 6.

¹⁷ *Message from the President of the United States relative to the Construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project*, 82nd Cong., 2d sess., 1952, H. Doc. No. 337, 3.

country since before it was founded. The Committee of Public Works later on in 1953 summed up the point cogently by asking in its report, “In other words, should the United States be a customer of Canada, or a partner?”¹⁸ Despite this dramatic reconfiguring of context of the Seaway, Congress delayed until June to finally vote it back into the Committee on Foreign Relations, ending its bid for passage in 1952.¹⁹

The next most influential development in the Seaway saga also had to do with Canada, though not with its government. The American steel industry based in the Midwest had been growing steadily since the 19th century, fueled mainly by iron ore found in the Lake Superior District and the Mesabi mountain range of Minnesota. As one concerned executive put it before the Senate committee “we have been gouging out our great mines at such a pace, including the fighting of two World Wars off these ranges, that now we are concerned about the remaining life of these riches.”²⁰

These concerns were not unfounded. The Department of the Interior reported steel industry requirements at 130 million tons for 1953 and projected only growth in demand at least until 1960.²¹

This agreed with a previous study conducted in 1950 for the National Security Council, which gloomily projected that “assuming something less than peak operations in the steel industry over the next decade and making no allowance for growth in consumption” then “these open pit reserves at the end of the period will be seriously reduced. Twenty years from now production cannot be even half as large as at present.”²²

¹⁸ House Committee on Public Works, *Report of the Committee on Public Works on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953, H. Rep. 1215, 36.

¹⁹ William R. Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 239.

²⁰ Steel production would increase over a thousand fold from 1860 to 1900 alone, a continued to nearly triple every fifteen or so years beyond that.

²¹ “Proposed Presentation Before The Senate Foreign Relations Committee At Hearings On The St. Lawrence Waterway Project,” Gruenther, Homer H. Assistant to the Deputy Assistant to the President, 1953-61: Records, 1953-60, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

²² *A Report to the National Security Council by the NSC Planning Board on National Security Interests in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes Seaway Project*, NSC 150, Washington, April 16, 1953, p. 9 found in White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Paper’s Subseries, Box No. 5, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

²² Report of the National Security Resources Board on the Importance of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project to National Security, April 24, 1950, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents*

The solution seemed to present itself, almost as if by magic, in the late 1940's. Geological surveys in the Labrador province of Canada had struck gold; not literally, but figuratively in the form of another metal, high-grade iron ore of perfect quality to feed the American steel industries prodigious appetite. And it was all within 360 miles of Gulf of St. Lawrence and the beginning of the St. Lawrence River. Its effect on the politics of the steel businessmen was equally magic. By the nearly 1950's nearly every large steel business actively backed the Seaway measures as a cheap and efficient way to access the Labrador strike. Among these powerful figures was George M. Humphrey, president of the M.A. Hanna Company, who carried his enthusiasm for the Seaway into his position as Secretary of Treasury under the newly elected President Eisenhower.²³ "As soon as we found that there was a large tonnage of ore in Labrador" and that "it was of advantage to the country for us to have it moved over the seaway, we changed our position and took a position in favor of the seaway; and we have been there ever since," he testified before the House Committee on Public Works.²⁴ Labrador ore had given the Seaway powerful business allies of its own.

While having company presidents amongst its largest supporters was certainly a massive boon for the Seaway, the depletion of Midwestern iron ore deposits and the seemingly inevitable reliance on foreign sources created other problems. Tapping the St. Lawrence to its fullest potential seemed to be the answer to all of them. Perhaps most insidious was the warning given by General Lewis Pick of the Army Corps of Engineers to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Pointing out that the only other route of transportation possible for foreign ores were eastern ports, he testified that "without the Seaway, the Midwest steel industry faces migration to the seaboard. The economic consequences to the Midwest could be tragic."²⁵

on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 49.

²³ Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 149.

²⁴ U.S., Cong., House, Committee on Public Works, *Hearings, St. Lawrence Seaway*, 83rd Cong., 477, quoted in Harry R. Mahood, *The St. Lawrence Seaway Bill of 1954: A Case Study of Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1960), microfilm, 53.

²⁵ Quoted in Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 151.

The last development that came about in favor of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1953 was its presentation. S. 2150, more commonly known as the “Wiley Bill” after its tireless sponsor, was introduced to the Senate by Senator Alexander Wiley in January of 1953.²⁶ Wiley himself admitted in a memorandum to Sherman Adams, the Assistant to the President, that “the Wiley Bill grows out of favor to approve the broader bill which has been under consideration for many years.”²⁷ In other words, it was not the entirety of the hopes and dream of Seaway advocates. What it turned out to be was the best aspects of the Seaway legislation, put together in a neat little package and tied with two very attractive ribbons.

The substance of the package would be the creation of the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation, a government corporation that would be “authorized to construct, in United States Territory, deep-water navigation works” that were “designated as ‘works solely for navigation’ in the joint report dated January 3, 1941.” It was, in effect, sliding the United States neatly back into the terms agreed to, but never acted upon, with Canada thirteen years before. There would be no excess commitment, and nothing more ceded to Canadian ambitions, and all put together in a nicely autonomous corporation that would handle most of the details.²⁸

The first ribbon on this package was the total cost. The Wiley Bill proposed to build the Seaway at a cost of around \$100 million dollars, based on estimates from the Army of Corps of Engineers, a much more palatable sum than the proposed \$566 million of previous legislation.²⁹ In a speech to the Senate in May of 1953, Senator Wiley stressed this affordability, saying “the \$100 million requested for the seaway canals does not constitute even the proverbial drop in the bucket, in relation to our vast seventy to eight

²⁶ *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 17.

²⁷ Alexander Wiley, memorandum, March 12, 1953, Sherman Adams Papers, Box 8, Dartmouth College Archives, Hanover, New Hampshire, courtesy of Dr. Michael Birkner.

²⁸ St. Lawrence Seaway Act, included in R.R. Baxter ed., *Documents on the St. Lawrence Seaway* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Inc., 1960), 25.

²⁹ House Committee on Public Works, *Report of the Committee on Public Works on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953, H. Rep. 1215, 33; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 301.

billion dollar budget – even if the \$100 million were to be spent all in the 1 year, rather than to be spread out over several years, as it will be.”³⁰

Not only would this \$100 million be a bargain price, it would in fact pay for itself. The Wiley Bill included a fairly recent provision that would make the St. Lawrence Seaway self-liquidating, and self-sustaining, through toll payments negotiated with Canada. “Although it is recognized that pending the negotiation of such an agreement it is impracticable to determine the exact amount that will be realized in toll revenue,” the Department of Commerce admitted, it still estimated in 1949 that with a toll rate possibly as low as 29 cents per ton on shipping, the Seaway could pay its way back in just 50 years. Moreover, estimates for total shipping per annum was put at 57 million tons or more, making the Seaway look not only self-liquidating, but potentially profitable as well.³¹

Hard reality dictated that in order to make the cost of this new legislation appetizing, some features would have to be shelved. In order to cut costs, the Wiley Bill had drastically cut down on the scope of the project. It proposed to dredge and deepen canals and to construct locks on only 46 consecutive miles of the river in upstate New York, putting the rest on Canada’s dime.³² It also cut out proposed works installing locks and canals that would connect the Great Lakes above Lake Erie, the ending point of the St. Lawrence River and thus much of the Seaway. These locks, while undoubtedly beneficial to the Midwest’s economy, could be postponed for the time being as they would be entirely in United States territory and therefore in no danger of being lost to foreign control. When Senator’s Edward Thye and Hubert Humphrey, both from the Midwest, submitted an amendment to add these locks, it was struck down in committee because “the inclusion of the amendment in S.2150 would only confuse the

³⁰ Senate Speech by Alexander Wiley on the St. Lawrence Seaway May 5, 1953, in Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larsen, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961: A Documentary History* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971), 264.

³¹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 1953, Report No. 441, 18-19.

³² *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 16 (map); St. Lawrence Seaway Act, included in R.R. Baxter ed., *Documents on the St. Lawrence Seaway* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Inc., 1960), 26.

main purpose of the bill.”³³ The purpose was, quite clearly, to slide the Seaway in some form or other through Congress at the eleventh hour.

The last factor, also part of the Wiley Bill, was the giving over of the hydroelectric power project into state control. Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway program had always been the development of a hydroelectric plant to provide power to the industrial areas of upstate New York, but these plans had always involved federal construction and control of such power. Many objected on these grounds, saying that such an obviously useful project was simply being bogged down by the controversial construction portions of Seaway legislation and giving it over to the states would help expedite both projects.³⁴ The Wiley Bill abandoned these concerns, and cut about \$600 million dollars, by omitting any plans for hydroelectric power from the legislation.³⁵

The onus for this project would instead rest on the state of New York, which was more than ready to accept it. The Power Authority of the State of New York had already drawn up plans to work with the Canadian province of Ontario in a joint development of hydroelectric power that would benefit both areas; the Wiley Bill was simply its *carte blanche*. All it had to do was obtain a license from the Federal Power Commission (FPC), which it had already attempted to do back in 1948, and be authorized as the designated authority of the United States to work with a foreign government.³⁶ The Power Authority filed its request with the FPC and the federal courts on August 8th, 1952 and started the clock ticking.³⁷

“Canada has offered to build the whole seaway,” Senator Wiley wrote to the then General Eisenhower in 1952, “provided the Federal Power Commission grants a license to the State of New York

³³ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 1953, Report No. 441, 14.

³⁴ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 214-215.

³⁵ House Committee on Public Works, *Report of the Committee on Public Works on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953, H. Rep. 1215, 32.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 195.

to complete the power dams.”³⁸ When the United State Ambassador informed him that, while it was unlikely, the FPC might rule against the Power Authority of the State of New York, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent reacted with dismay, saying that “in such case [the] whole St. Lawrence project might be delayed another 3 or 4 years.”³⁹ Development of the hydroelectric power along the St. Lawrence was Canada’s last obstacle to beginning the Seaway on her own. Once that was gone, so was any chance of United States participation. How many chances it would have depended entirely on how quickly the FPC would rule on the Power Authority case.

With all of these new factors, it would seem that Seaway proponents were coming into 1953 in a position of strength, despite the time bomb they faced in the FPC. Such a view is deceiving. While these “favorable developments” certainly gave the Seaway cause for hope, they were useless in one key way; they failed to undermine the opposition’s arguments. Senator Wiley called out the opponent’s case as “hackneyed antiproject arguments” which were “nothing but a repetition of all the moth-eaten hobgoblin claims which the opponents have trumped up in the past.”⁴⁰ Scathing rhetoric certainly, but little else. The opponents arguments may have been old, but they still held weight even with the fresh set of positive factors pro-Seaway forces had fallen into in Congress.

The Seaway opponent’s chief argument was that of money. They estimated the Seaway costing as much as two and a half billion dollars; a huge expenditure, they argued, for little economic gain to the country.⁴¹ As will be shown, this argument held particular weight with the budget-conscious Eisenhower, but it also held sway over many legislators, especially neutral Congressmen from regions that would not be affected by the development or non-development of the Seaway.

³⁸ Confidential Memorandum from Senator Wiley for General Eisenhower, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 696, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1952-53 (3) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

³⁹ Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent to the Ambassador in Canada, Ottawa, October 27, 1952, in William Z. Slany, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), 2038.

⁴⁰ Senate Speech by Alexander Wiley on the St. Lawrence Seaway May 5, 1953, in Robert L. Branyan and Larsen, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration*, 264.

⁴¹ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 30, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, L-2(2) March 30, 1953 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

The Wiley bill was designed as it was to combat this argument and win over support from these neutral areas. The effect was negligible, as the opposition discerned the strategy from the get go. Realizing that the Wiley bill had to cut large amounts of substance to get such an appealing price tag, and that the areas affected by those cuts would not fall silent even if the bill was enacted, they feared further expenditure at a later date, employing a quaint metaphor in an informational pamphlet published by the Association of American Railroads:

S. 589 [the Wiley Bill] if enacted would be like the nose of a camel under the tent. It would, in its terms, commit the United States, acting through a government-owned corporation, to an expenditure estimated at less than \$100,000,000. But this hundred million dollars would be but the first installment on a project which in its final form would cost many times that amount.⁴²

It was a clever ruse, they claimed. Sneak a cheap, limited program through now to get the United States committed to spending more and more to upkeep and improve. The Thye/Humphrey Amendment seemed to be an implicit recognition of this; the Wiley Bill had left out the locks in the upper Great Lakes which Congressmen would still lobby for as part of the project after the bill had been signed. Nor was that the only “hidden” expense. The opposition argued strongly that only about 10% of the American merchant fleet could actually sail through the proposed depth of 27 feet in the canals.⁴³ Not only was this a strong argument against the real size of American interests in the Seaway, but also a further temptation to spend more money at a later date, to deepen those channels to usable depths. And then there were the harbors to consider. Even if the Seaway was dredged to a deep enough level to accommodate ocean shipping, Detroit was possibly the only city on the Great Lakes that had a harbor large or deep enough to deliver too.⁴⁴ States would surely want federal assistance in expanding their port facilities to take advantage of the new federal Seaway.⁴⁵

⁴² Association of American Railroads, *The Entering Wedge* (Washington: American Association of Railroads, 1953), 8, quoted in Harry R. Mahood, *The St. Lawrence Seaway Bill of 1954: A Case Study of Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1960), microfilm, 29.

⁴³ Letter to Sherman Adams, Central Files, General Files, GF 129-B-5, Box No. 1014, 1956, 129-B-6 St. Lawrence Seaway 1953 fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas; “Canada Tells U.S. to ‘Fish or Cut Bait’ on St. Lawrence Seaway,” *The Sunday Star*, May 10, 1953.

⁴⁴ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 30, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Donovan, *Eisenhower: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 78.

Thus the Wiley bill, in the view of the opposition, did not make the Seaway any cheaper. Their old arguments still stood and were still influential in the highest circles. Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks pointed out in a Cabinet meeting that the cost estimates were still “indefinite.”⁴⁶ Senator Leverett Saltonstall, a Republican from Massachusetts, an area of near permanent opposition to the Seaway because of port interests in Boston, remarked during a legislative meeting with President Eisenhower that “he could favor it if ever he could be shown how a ship with a 34-foot draft could get through a 27-foot channel!”⁴⁷ The Wiley bill failed to do what it needed to do to win a slugging match in Congress; undermine the opposition’s largest and most influential argument.

The other two factors, the Labrador ore strike and Canada’s resolve to go it alone, the opposition welcomed or viewed as largely irrelevant. If they felt like tackling the iron ore question head on, they argued that steel requirements could be met domestically with the increased development of taconites, or iron ore of a lower grade and often buried deeper in the mountains. It was a futile argument as the formidable business minds of the steel companies were already pouring money into such experiment and finding them too costly, only furthering their case for the Seaway and a cheaper route for higher grade ore imports.⁴⁸ So the opposition wasted little time on the subject and instead turned the ore into a weapon in their own arsenal. “What point is there to digging a seaway to bring ore by boat from Labrador, when it can be shipped around to Baltimore and transshipped by train at lower cost?” they asked in one newspaper article.⁴⁹ It was a needless accessory, and a superfluous expense, when there was a perfectly good system already in place. There was more than a little self-interest here as well; both east coast port cities such as Baltimore, Boston and Norfolk and the railway companies would reap the benefits of a fresh source of vital imports. The Labrador strike was something to be celebrated by the collected opposition

⁴⁶ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, April 24, 1953, pg. 2, in Joan Gibson and Paul Kesaris, ed., *Minutes and Documents of the Cabinet Meetings of President Eisenhower, 1953-1961* (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), Gettysburg College Library, microfilm.

⁴⁷ Legislative Leadership Meeting, February 9, 1953, Supplementary Notes, in Robert Lester, ed. *Diaries of Dwight David Eisenhower, 1953-1961* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1987), Gettysburg College Library, microfilm.

⁴⁸ “Proposed Presentation Before The Senate Foreign Relations Committee At Hearings On The St. Lawrence Waterway Project,” Gruenther, Homer H. Assistant to the Deputy Assistant to the President, 1953-61: Records, 1953-60, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁴⁹ “Canada Tells U.S. to ‘Fish or Cut Bait’ on St. Lawrence Seaway,” *The Sunday Star*, May 10, 1953.

interests just as much as the pro-Seaway forces; they just had the additional task of making sure the Seaway was not built to threaten them. But that had been in their plan from the beginning and forced no real adjustment in policy.

The last, an arguably most critical, factor was welcomed by the anti-Seaway lobby. Opponents of the Seaway embraced Canada's "go it alone" decision in two ways. The first was to applaud Canada's willingness to "roll up its sleeves and do something on its own account," something that would both allow it to flex its post World War II economic muscles and create something beneficial to both countries that was not on the American dime.⁵⁰ Senator J. William Fulbright, a Democrat from Arkansas found this point of view to jell particularly well with an attack on Republican economics, saying that "we've reached a point" that "a friendly nation, Canada, offers to take over this project and do it alone. And some of the men on this floor who have been loudest in complaining about economy just won't stand for it."⁵¹

Opponents also attacked the advocates' claims that the United States would not have a "voice" in the running of the Seaway on two counts. First, they pointed out that the United States had been getting along just fine with the current St. Lawrence River shipping arrangements, chiefly through the all-Canadian Welland Canal that had been all-Canadian for the past 100 years. Second, they also noted that only a fraction of the proposed seaway would actually be in the United States, stating that "we would have no 'voice' in the 1,000 odd miles of the St. Lawrence river and gulf from the sea, which are wholly in Canadian territory."⁵²

By and large, Canada's willingness to construct the Seaway on its own was a double-edged sword. As will be touched on a little later, it was partly a spur in the side of American efforts at participation, but it could also be the death knell for any joint participation. This, more than anything else, worked to the Seaway opponents' advantage. With the only thing preventing Canada from sinking her

⁵⁰ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 273.

⁵¹ Quoted in, "Enmity to Seaway Ended By Dirksen," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1954.

⁵² "The Current St. Lawrence Argument!" Central Files, General Files, GF 129-B-6, Box No. 1015, 1956, 129-B-6 Protesting Development of Construction St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

spade into the ground the Federal Power Commission's decision, the opposition just had to kill time. While there was the possibility of a negative ruling by the FPC, this outcome was unlikely, and even if the Power Authority of the State of New York's claim was struck down, there were no shortage of power companies in the United States willing to take on such a project. Canada's determination had made the opposition's plans that much more decisive and easy to carry out.

For all their hype and hopefulness, the new factors emerging onto the scene in 1953 did not change the situation. They failed to do what they most desperately needed to do to give the Seaway legislation a tangible edge in Congress; undermine or invalidate large parts of the opposition's position to win over more votes. Instead, the opposition hardly had to modify their "moth-eaten hobgoblin claims," to counter these "favorable developments." When it came down to it in 1953 and 1954, the eleventh hour for American involvement in the St. Lawrence Seaway, the same old line was still drawn in the sand, having been pushed no farther forwards or backwards by either side. The Wiley bill seemed doomed to the status quo, which with the looming deadline of Canada's proposed action, would consign it to the legislative graveyard.

Yet on May 13, 1954 the St. Lawrence Seaway Act became law, overcoming the still deadlocked and unfavorable situation in Congress in 1953.⁵³ What changed to allow this? It certainly was not any one, or combination, of the above discussed factors in Congress. Instead, it was the man whose signature brought the bill into law, the only factor to have genuinely changed since the reopening of the Seaway issue after World War II. While the legislative branch remained at loggerheads, the executive branch had changed its face to the beaming, balding visage of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Eisenhower was essential because he showed that Administration support was more than a generic precondition to Congressional action on the Seaway. He demonstrated that it could not be taken for granted and, when properly applied, executive pressure could be efficacious.

* * *

⁵³ St. Lawrence Seaway Act, included in R.R. Baxter ed., *Documents on the St. Lawrence Seaway*, 25.

“Eisenhower has come out strongly for the Seaway,” a Canadian reporter said in 1953. “So did McKinley,” another one quipped, riffing on Canadian impatience with the United States’ efforts and illustrating the supposed impotence of the executive branch when it came to this issue.⁵⁴ Even Harry Truman, who pled for it in virtually every State of the Union Address, budget message and speech to Congress from 1946 until he left office, seemed powerless.⁵⁵ For both historians and contemporaries it is easy to see where the likeable Ike might seem unlikely to change the equation.

For starters, his press conferences on the question hardly exuded control and confidence on the subject. When asked, a month after taking office, if he could state his attitude on the St. Lawrence project, he answered, “No, I cannot.”⁵⁶ A month later when again asked to comment on his Administration’s decisions regarding it, he admitted to having “forgotten whether we have agreed to keep those confidential” and while he offered an eloquent personal statement on the subject, was evasive as to how the Administration might act, or if it would act at all.⁵⁷

Historians have an even more garbled image, especially those working before the declassification of much of the Administration’s files and records, as they have the murky benefit of hindsight. Positive insight of Eisenhower’s role bookends the actual formative period of his position on the project. The Seaway was signed into law by Eisenhower in 1954, a measure he had endorsed in 1946 as head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁵⁸ Even as late as 1952 he included in his campaign kickoff speech in his hometown of Abilene, Kansas.⁵⁹ When looked at as a whole, Eisenhower’s support, while vaguely explained, never really seems in doubt.

⁵⁴ *New York Journal of Commerce*, January 14, 1954, quoted in Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 164.

⁵⁵ *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 189-195.

⁵⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower Press Conference, February 25, 1953, accessed online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>.

⁵⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower Press Conference, March 19, 1953, accessed online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>

⁵⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Walter Jodok Kohler, Jr, May 29, 1952, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, accessed online at <http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/>.

⁵⁹ “Transcript of General Eisenhower’s First Press Conference Giving His Political Views,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1952.

Yet this is far from the truth. He had a complex relationship with the issue starting, almost literally, from the moment he was sworn in. At a luncheon early in February, Senator Wiley had expressed his concern that Eisenhower had neglected to mention the Seaway in his inaugural address. The President took the time to respond in a letter, telling Wiley that “frankly, the omission was intentional, not because of any inclination to slight this project, but because I have not yet had full opportunity to analyze thoroughly its complicated and vast ramifications.”⁶⁰ This must have frustrated Wiley who had sent Eisenhower a very polite memorandum while he was still president-elect and meeting with his Cabinet in the Commodore Hotel, reminding him that his “previous statements on the Seaway have evidenced [his] keen understanding of the importance U.S. participation.” This was no doubt in reference to his endorsement of the project while head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶¹

But Eisenhower did not operate that way. He made at least part of his reasoning and his methods clear in another personal letter:

Of course, when I was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I had no reluctance at all in commenting on this matter because of the direct connection that I felt it had with the military security of the United States. However...anything that I might say on any controversial legislation at this particular time...would not be looked upon as a soldier's professional opinion but would be considered a “political” move and hence entirely inappropriate to my present situation.⁶²

It is, Eisenhower was saying, a different time. As a presidential candidate and eventually as president, he had different responsibilities that warranted different responses than those he gave as part of the military. That response happened to be one of needing to be party to all sides of the issue and seeking the advice of other, more qualified individuals on those sides. He stressed this repeatedly in his weekly Cabinet meetings, as well as his frequent meetings with Congressional leaders. The month after his letter to Wiley, the Senator suggested that there might not be a Republican Congress in 1955 if Eisenhower did

⁶⁰ Dwight Eisenhower to Senator Alexander Wiley, February 6, 1953, in Robert L. Branyan and Larsen, eds. *The Eisenhower Administration*, 258.

⁶¹ Alexander Wiley to Dwight Eisenhower, December 30, 1952, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 696, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1952-53 (3) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁶² Dwight D. Eisenhower to Walter Jodok Kohler, Jr, May 29, 1952, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, accessed online at <http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/>.

not take a pro-Seaway stand. Ike reprimanded him, saying the matter was “being studied” and that definite position would be taken at a later date.⁶³

Emblematic of this is the approach was when Eisenhower invited a few of the biggest names in the railroad industry to meet with him one Sunday afternoon to discuss the Seaway and to help him get his mind around the opposition’s perspective. Part of that meeting was the presentation of a memorandum by the Chicago Chamber of Commerce laying out the opposition’s argument against the Seaway in terms of cost, which he then made required reading for every department with an interest in the bill, including the Cabinet.⁶⁴ He found their arguments so persuasive that he delayed the Administration taking a final position on the issue, saying the Cabinet had “never heard fully all the arguments against the Seaway.”⁶⁵ To help process this information he asked Secretary of Commerce Weeks to “organize consultation among the State, Defense, Interior, and Commerce Departments for the purposes of developing a recommended position for the Administration to take.”⁶⁶ It was Ike the delegator at work; he trusted his subordinates enough to make a call now that they had all the relevant facts, arguments, and counter-arguments.

The chief sticking point for Eisenhower personally was cost. Government expense and balancing the budget were higher priorities with him than with the pump-priming Roosevelt or the gung-ho Truman and anything that looked unduly expensive gave him pause. In all circles, Eisenhower repeatedly said that he “did not want to see us involved in any billion-dollar project on our own,” though he admitted to the

⁶³ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 23, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, L-2(1) March 23, 1953 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁶⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Milton S. Eisenhower, April 29, 1953, in *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, accessed online at <http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/>.

⁶⁵ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, April 10, 1953, pg. 2, in Gibson and Kesaris, ed. *Minutes and Documents of the Cabinet Meetings of President Eisenhower, 1953-1961*, Gettysburg College Library, microfilm.

⁶⁶ Gabriel Hauge to Secretaries of State, Defense and Interior, April 25, 1953, memorandum, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 696, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1952-53 (4) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

Cabinet in early March of 1953 that his “earlier lack of enthusiasm had been motivated by the extensive costs of proposals prior to Senator Wiley’s.”⁶⁷

The Sunday meeting with the rail executives later that month tempered his optimism. He brought it up at the next legislative meeting, making clear that the railroad heads had pushed their point across that the Wiley bill was, as he put it, “a booby trap.” He was shocked at the two and half billion dollar price tag they estimated and joked that, as president, he would have to get used to talking about a billion disrespectfully, but he “can’t do it so far.”⁶⁸ But he now knew all sides of the issue and could discuss and delegate from there.

Other doubts about the Seaway in Congress assailed Eisenhower as well, not the least of which was that it might split the historically fractious Republican Party.⁶⁹ The Seaway was a fantastically regional issue, so much so that despite having a majority Republican Congress, much of that majority was fractured by the Seaway. Democrats had experienced, and were still experiencing, a similar problem. Such was the makeup of Congress on the issue that in early 1953 Senate leaders did not believe it was possible to have a solid Seaway policy in either party.⁷⁰ Representative Charles Halleck, the Republican majority leader in the House, suggested they “might as well sit on it.”⁷¹ As the historical record testifies, his advice was not taken and by December of that year, the St. Lawrence Seaway topped the list of legislation to be pushed in the 83rd Congress.⁷²

⁶⁷ Discussion at the 140th Meeting of the National Security Council on Wednesday, April 23, 1953, memorandum, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President (Ann Whiteman File) 1953-1961, NSC Series, Box No. 4, 140th Meeting of NSC April 22, 1953, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas; Minutes of Cabinet Meeting 3/13/53 (continued), pg. 2, in Gibson and Kesaris, eds., *Minutes and Documents of the Cabinet Meetings of President Eisenhower*, 1953-196, Gettysburg College Library, microfilm.

⁶⁸ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 30, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁶⁹ Donovan, *Eisenhower: The Inside Story*, 77.

⁷⁰ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 23, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁷¹ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on February 9, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, L-1, January 26, February 9 and 16, 1953 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁷² Minutes for Legislative Conference on December 17-19, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, Legislative Conference December 17-19, 1953 (1), Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

Motivation to work with the legislation for the St. Lawrence Seaway came from several different angles. Ike himself reports in his memoir, *Mandate for Change*, that the Labrador ore factor and the security concerns attached to it influenced him the most:

To me, this fact was central and overriding. Moreover, in time the St. Lawrence Seaway would become an economic necessity. The United States should move now, I was convinced, before a national crisis forced it into a crash program at a much greater cost.⁷³

It is a noble and far-sighted claim, but one that is perhaps a little too rosy with hindsight. Eisenhower may have felt strongly about the need for steel, but much of the reasoning that overcame his worries about the potentially astronomical cost was provided by his advisors, particularly on the National Security Council and the Cabinet. No official Administration position was issued until they had both investigated and given reports on the subject. The NSC, as could be expected, gave a report citing the Seaway's importance to security, but another factor seemed to trump even national security in administrative logic.⁷⁴

The statement of Cabinet opinion, passed on to legislative leaders to announce Administration support, reports its first reasons as:

- a. The Canadian Government intends to move in any event and our interests could badly suffer if we did not take some action to achieve cooperative control.
- b. Unless the United States cooperates, Canada will construct the Seaway on Canadian soil, at a cost substantially in excess of the proposed United States location. This will result in increased toll costs to United States shipping.⁷⁵

“All that the Administration has done is state that the matter does have certain security angles,” Eisenhower wrote in a letter to Milton, “after you get this far, you next have the fact that Canada is going to construct the Seaway whether or not the United States participates.”⁷⁶ Such is the crux of the issue.

⁷³ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 301.

⁷⁴ *A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on National Security Interests in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes Seaway Project*, NSC 150/1, Washington, April 23, 1953, p. 1, found in White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, Special Assistant Series, Presidential Subseries, Box No. 1, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁷⁵ Memorandum by the President, undated, Washington, in Slany, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2073.

⁷⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Milton S. Eisenhower, April 29, 1953, in *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, accessed online at <http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/>.

Security was only one part of the much more holistic concern that when Canada went ahead and built its Seaway, the United States would lose out in multiple areas, economy being one of them.

International relations, especially with Canada, might be another. “The Canadian Government regards the St. Lawrence Project as the most important single facet in its relations with the United States,” reported one state department memorandum. Anything, or any more, done to hinder or delay a definite United States commitment either way might result in a deterioration of relations with a critical neighbor.⁷⁷ If prompt and positive action were taken, however, it would improve relations in regard to other areas of negotiations with Canada, such as the development of the Columbia River or the DEW line radar defense initiative the United States had been pushing for.⁷⁸

Eisenhower’s other major motivation was a little more subtle. While the specter of loss of American control of such a vital waterway certainly loomed large another more domestic, and more admittedly self-serving, reason materialized. Over the course of 1953, the Seaway had become an important part of the Republican legislative program. The evaluation process that the entire issue was subject to fit in with Eisenhower’s methodology, which he explained to his brother Milton towards the end of that year. “It has been our general intention to use 1953 as a period of study and formulation of programs,” he wrote, “we have always felt that the ‘Administration Bible’ would be brought out for publication in the delivery of the 1954 Message to the Congress.”⁷⁹ The St. Lawrence Seaway topped the list in the 1954 State of the Union.

Part of this “period of study” method was letting Congress hash things out. A Seaway proposal had been introduced in both houses of Congress, by Senator Wiley in the Senate and by Representative

⁷⁷ Paper Prepared in Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, undated, Washington, in Slany, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2074.

⁷⁸ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, March 27, 1953, pg. 2, in Gibson and Kesaris, eds., *Minutes and Documents of the Cabinet Meetings of President Eisenhower, 1953-1961*, Gettysburg College Library, microfilm; Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs to the Under Secretary of State, August 23, 1954, Washington, in Slany, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2138.

⁷⁹ Dwight Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, November 6, 1953, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President (Ann Whiteman File) 1953-1961, Names Series, Box No. 12, Milton Eisenhower 1952-1953 fol., 2, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

George Dondero in the House of Representatives, so hearings were being scheduled. The *New York Times* reported in March of 1953 that “Senate hearings would go ahead without any recommendation from the White House. That is the policy being followed by the Administration on several issues.”⁸⁰ Hearings were Eisenhower’s way of drawing out the facts, at least in the Seaway case. Torn about the official position of his Administration after his meeting with the railroad heads, he was anxious and interested to see what information the hearings would draw out.⁸¹

But that was 1953. “Once we have taken our stand on that program and specified in it those measures on which priority action is mandatory, then, of course, all of us, with me in the lead, will constantly pound the drums for the necessary legislation,” he further explained to Milton.⁸² Ike was not “out of step with 10 Presidents who asked [for] Seaway” as one Midwestern newspaper article claimed, at least not in the end.⁸³ 1953 was an evaluation year, a year for the new Administration to measure the existing legislation and ponder new items. 1954 would be the action year, as it proved to be for the Seaway. Eisenhower’s methods may have been “out of step” with those of previous presidents, but the St. Lawrence Seaway issue was not out of step with his program.

The passage of the Seaway became special priority in the 83rd Congress for a both the practical reasons and one large political reason; it would look good on the Administration’s resume. With mid-term elections coming up in 1954 and with the Republican Party holding onto Congress by its fingernails, it was something Eisenhower felt the Administration needed. But with the year delay dictated by Eisenhower’s *modus operandi*, it became urgent that the program get through Congress quickly and make as big an impact as possible. Ike reportedly told his legislative leaders, rather emphatically, that they “just

⁸⁰ “Seaway Issue Left Open,” *The New York Times*, March 31, 1953.

⁸¹ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 30, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁸² Dwight Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, November 6, 1953, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁸³ Milwaukee Journal, April 21, 1953, newspaper, Central Files, General Files, GF 129-B-5, Box No. 1014, 1956, 129-B-6 St. Lawrence Seaway 1953 fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

got to understand [the] need for having a record to talk about!”⁸⁴ With the Seaway having been a controversial topic for decades, it would nicely fit the administration needs. The signing ceremony would be especially elaborate, quite consciously more so than even the subsequent highway act. It would be covered on television and the president would use no less than nine pens, of which three were specially made from the wood of old Fort Detroit and engraved with the words; “The pen that built the St. Lawrence Seaway.” They were then gifted to the Seaway’s staunchest Congressional supporters, chiefly from the Midwest.⁸⁵

It was a spectacle too long delayed, in the president’s opinion. Almost immediately after the ceremony, Eisenhower asked Senator William Knowland, the Republican majority leader in the Senate, into his office and “laid down the law to him on the program.” Apparently the Seaway triumph had been too late in coming for Ike’s liking because he “flatly warned Knowland that unless [the] Senate stepped up and started to pass the program more rapidly, the President would go on the air and make his own fight for it.”⁸⁶ The Wiley-Dondero bill turned out to be a bit of everything that Ike wanted and needed from legislation; a public works project, a foreign relations boost, an accomplishment to point to, and a test case for future challenging legislation.

Yet these were all long term, strategic considerations. In the short term, the Wiley bill remained mired in committee and controversy. Here too, Eisenhower was recognized by many as the man who could who could change the status quo on the Capitol Hill debate on the Seaway. “A strong affirmative position by you will assure the passage of a bill on the seaway,” Milton wrote to him.⁸⁷ Milton lived and

⁸⁴ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 29, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 2, L-12(2) March 29, 1954 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁸⁵ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on May 10, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 2, L-13(2) May 10, 1954 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas; “Hands Across the River,” *The New York Times*, May 14, 1954; May 13, 1954, memorandum, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 697, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1954 (3) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁸⁶ Thursday, May 13, 1954, diary entry, Hagerty, James C.: Papers, 1953-1961, Diary Entries, Box No. 1, Hagerty Diary May 1954 fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁸⁷ Milton Eisenhower to Dwight Eisenhower, April 27, 1953, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President (Ann Whiteman File) 1953-1961, Names Series, Box No. 12, Milton Eisenhower 1952-1953 fol., 4, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

worked in Pennsylvania, a hotbed of anti-Seaway sentiment because of the coal and railroad businesses centered there, and this local environment influenced his opinions and how he advised his brother. But regardless of his view, he recognized that the other Eisenhower had what it took to make the Seaway a reality.

The other man who recognized this, or was willing to hedge his bets on it, was Senator Alexander Wiley. In March of 1853 he wrote a long letter to Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's assistant, stating his case. "Nothing short of an all-out fight by the Chief Executive personally, and by every agency of his Administration, can assure victory for the Seaway in the 83rd Congress," he wrote.⁸⁸ Wiley was not a fool and understood that for all of the positive factors his side had gained going into 1953; the spur of Canada's determination to forage ahead, Labrador ore and the allies it brought, and even his own economically palatable bill, had hardly changed the situation in Congress. The one thing that had changed was Eisenhower. "If Teddy Roosevelt had adopted a 'let-Congress-decide-all-by-itself' attitude, we never would have had the Panama Canal," he continued, invoking precedent on another public works waterway and one of the most highly respected presidents in history.⁸⁹ There could be no overstating how essential Eisenhower's support was.

It came not a moment too soon, for the hourglass was about to empty on the chance for United States participation. On November 4th, 1953 the New York State Power Authority was granted a 50-year license by the Federal Power Commission to begin work on the power project the Wiley bill had cut.⁹⁰ Having no choice, Eisenhower issued an executive order that same day naming the Power Authority the American designee to construct the works with a foreign power.⁹¹ The only thing that was stopping Canada from sinking her spades into the banks of the St. Lawrence were the few appeals by several minor power companies who held some weak hope of gaining the contract. But the main obstacle was overcome

⁸⁸ Alexander Wiley to Sherman Adams, March 17, 1953, Sherman Adams Papers, Box 8, Dartmouth College Archives, Hanover, New Hampshire, courtesy of Dr. Michael Birkner.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 197.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

and the 83rd Congress promised to be the final opportunity for American involvement in the project. Fortunately, Seaway forces had a powerful and more determined ally for the session.

This ally was ultimately pivotal in justifying the St. Lawrence project in terms of national security. The Seaway had been a defense issue since President Franklin Roosevelt had allocated \$1 million dollars from the defense budget for preliminary surveys in 1940, but at that point the move was little more than a gimmick, though it did not remain that way for long.⁹² Two powerful reasons ultimately emerged in the post-World War II era that made the argument for national security a potent force. But one aspect remained the same; the defense argument always rested squarely on the executive branch to exercise and Eisenhower proved uniquely capable of this.

Indeed, he outlined both the key reasons in his State of the Union address in 1954, the same address where he canonized his Administration's legislative program. The first and most broad-based reason was the problem of continental defense. "Our relations with Canada" now "involve more and more the unbreakable ties of strategic interdependence. Both nations now need the St. Lawrence Seaway for security as well as for economic reasons," he stated at the end of the address.⁹³ The largest continental defense ill that the St. Lawrence program would remedy was Canada's desperate need for power. "If the power project is not undertaken soon," Lester Pearson wrote to the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, "this area of Canada will face a serious impairment of its industrial capacity."⁹⁴

The scale of this threat could not be taken lightly. The area of Ontario to be served by the St. Lawrence power project already the area faced power shortages and was responsible for one-half of Canada's total manufacturing capabilities.⁹⁵ To make matters worse, the majority of defense manufacturing was concentrated in the area, including "100% of jet engines to 80% of mechanical transport to 60% of electronic equipment," quite possibly making the crisis of power there a bilateral

⁹² Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 129.

⁹³ The President's State of the Union Message, January 7, 1954, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 47.

⁹⁴ Lester Pearson to John Foster Dulles, March 24, 1953, Ottawa, in Slany, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2071.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

issue for continental defense.⁹⁶ It was also noted in a memorandum from the Canadian government, in a subtle effort at providing a little more international leverage on the matter, that over 90 percent of the nickel used by the United States came from Ontario, specifically the area most in need of St. Lawrence power.⁹⁷

The security issue at stake in the United States was a little more theoretical. “The ability to convert swiftly from partial to all-out mobilization is imperative,” Eisenhower intoned when he introduced the Seaway in his speech. “For the first time, mobilization officials know what the requirements are for 1,000 major items needed for military use,” he continued and alluded to the need for the United States to protect its continental transportation system.⁹⁸

The factors behind this idea of transportation and mobilization security are varied and complex. The Seaway could serve any number of defense needs simply by existing; it would provide another shipping route and opened up the “use of Great Lakes shipyards for the construction of much larger vessels for ocean service” and “to further the dispersion of shipbuilding and reducing the problem of transporting materials and components from their points of production to costal shipyards.”⁹⁹ This was small potatoes, though, when compared to the broader defense benefits.

Part of the issue was control. “While it is difficult for me to conceive of a struggle in which we would be involved that would not also involve Canada,” Eisenhower wrote in a letter to a prominent Senator, who was still in the process of deciding whether or not to support the Seaway, “yet at the same time we cannot ignore the possibility of such an eventuality,” that “its use could be denied to us at the

⁹⁶ Guy V. Henry to The Chairman, U.S. Section, Permanent Joint Board on Defense to the President, April 23, 1953, Washington, memorandum, Slany, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2076.

⁹⁷ Memorandum From the Canadian Government to the Department of State, October 20, 1953, Slany, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume VI. Western Europe and Canada, Part 2*, 2110-2111.

⁹⁸ The President’s State of the Union Message, January 7, 1954, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 47.

⁹⁹ Report of the National Security Resources Board on the Importance of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project to National Security, April 24, 1950, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 48.

very time we needed it most.”¹⁰⁰ The United States could not, while it had the opportunity to do so cheaply and in good faith with their neighbor, pass up the chance to participate in something so potential useful to wartime transportation and manufacture.

The protection that the Seaway would afford that transportation would be crucial in any upcoming war. Admiral Arthur Radford, speaking on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated in a letter to Senator Homer Ferguson that “this seaway would afford access of a relatively protected route to additional sources of high-grade iron ore. It is well known that our own reserves of high-grade iron ore were materially depleted in World War II, and as a result we must increasingly rely in the future on alternative sources of supply.” It was an indirect way of bringing up that long ocean transport routes, such as those needed to move from port to port on North America’s significant coastline, were tenuous and constantly at risk of enemy attack, either from submarine, fleet or airplane.¹⁰¹ The Seaway would alleviate a lot of that risk, especially for the oceans routes needed to cross the area from the Labrador strike to large ports such as Boston, Baltimore or Norfolk.

The centrality of iron ore to the issue of security cannot be overstated. Ports and control were all excellent arguments, but the need for iron ore to feed the great industrial machine of the Midwest was at the front and center of any writing on the subject. Eisenhower, as has been shown above, wrote about it in his memoirs with great aplomb, but numerous generals, Congressmen, and committee reports also talked at length about the criticality of the iron ore situation. It is interesting how the Labrador strike failed to directly change things in Congress, but instead gave an Administration issue extra weight.

For national security in the St. Lawrence Seaway argument had always been an executive weapon to wield. Congressmen bickered over it in committee, certainly, but whether the issue had substance always rested on the Administration, as it alone was directly concerned with a vital aspect of the argument

¹⁰⁰ Dwight Eisenhower to Fredrick Payne, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Box No. 8, St. Lawrence Seaway (Legis.), Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁰¹ Admiral Arthur Radford to Homer Ferguson, January 18, 1954, in House Committee on Public Works, *Report of the Committee on Public Works on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953, H. Rep. 1215, 93-95.

– policy. It was the president and his Secretary of Defense, as well as the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who determined defense policy and if they deemed the Seaway important could incorporate it directly into the defense policy of the nation without Congressional say. Similarly, if the executive deemed it unnecessary, Congress could only do so much to force it onto the defined policy, and any pro-Seaway lobbies who tried to make the argument would have executive disagreement pressing down like a wet blanket.

Similarly, it was the Secretary of State and the president who conducted negotiations with Canada and were in the best position to judge Canada's attitudes, which gave them a virtual monopoly on judgment and presentation of the policy crafted from that. And so on down the line with the Commerce, Justice, Budget and any other Department that might be relevant to national security and the Seaway. What Congress could actually do in making it a live, influential policy issue was purely academic. It could pass judgment, say yes or no, but it could not shape national security into a tangible benefit of the project, like it could with self-liquidation.

The Administration could also select who it did or did not want to testify on the issue within the executive branch and the Army. Under Eisenhower, several generals testified on behalf of the Seaway, including Brigadier General Bernard L. Robinson, the Deputy Chief of Army Engineers.¹⁰² Higher ranking Administration officials such as Frank Nash, the Assistant Secretary of Defense, gave a long and detailed testimony before committees in both Houses and laid out the Administration's national security agenda on the Seaway near verbatim.¹⁰³

Eisenhower proved particularly adept at the use of the issue of national security. The top example must be, of course, his use of the argument in his State of the Union address, which included the Seaway

¹⁰² "General Endorses Seaway Proposal, *The New York Times*, April 15, 1953.

¹⁰³ Testimony of Hon. Frank Nash, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Before the House Committee on Public Works, June 11, 1953, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 60-64.

on his short list of national defense initiatives and mentions nothing about any other factor, economic feasibility or otherwise.¹⁰⁴

His other major tool was the National Security Council, which laid out its pro-Seaway stance in NSC 150 on April 16th, 1953.¹⁰⁵ While it was stressed that “the National Security Council’s recommendations” had been “based solely on considerations of national security and that the Council desired to avoid becoming involved” in other issues, particularly that of cost, its decision made an immediate splash when the news hit Congress.¹⁰⁶ A letter was drafted to be sent from Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay to Senator Wiley, who had asked for the view of the department on the Seaway. It was seven pages long and stated the findings of the NSC in detail, going above and beyond what was strictly necessary from a document still classified.¹⁰⁷ What this implies is uncertain, but it was an early communication to the Seaway’s greatest advocate the full extent and weight of the Administration’s view on the national security angle.

Then there was the Ike factor. Eisenhower was a unique executive in the history of the Seaway struggle; he was a military man, a former five star general. Both Seaway advocate and opponents “conceded that the President’s strong advocacy would pick up votes for it,” especially on the issue of national security.¹⁰⁸ They were right. Senator H. Alexander Smith, a New Jersey Republican and a typically staunch foe of the Seaway, suddenly switched sides in January of 1954, saying this was his “vote of confidence” in President Eisenhower. “There is no living man today whose views on our national

¹⁰⁴ The President’s State of the Union Message, January 7, 1954, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 47.

¹⁰⁵ *A Report to the National Security Council by the NSC Planning Board on National Security Interests in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes Seaway Project*, NSC 150, Washington, April 16, 1953, found in White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Paper’s Subseries, Box No. 5, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁰⁶ Discussion at the 140th Meeting of the National Security Council on Wednesday, April 23, 1953, memorandum, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President (Ann Whiteman File) 1953-1961, NSC Series, Box No. 4, 140th Meeting of NSC April 22, 1953, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁰⁷ *A Report to the National Security Council by the NSC Planning Board on National Security Interests in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes Seaway Project*, NSC 150, Washington, April 16, 1953, p. 9, found in White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁸ “Seaway Declared Needed For Defense,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1954.

security I would respect as much as the expert military views of our own President,” he said in justification of his actions, “I have come to the conclusion that I must support the President of the United States in this field in which he is so pre-eminently expert.”¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Eisenhower’s position was swinging votes from neutral regions, such as Democratic Senator Stuart Symington from Missouri, who had been previously neutral.¹¹⁰ There seemed to be no corner in which Eisenhower’s reputation might not reach.

Smith and Symington were only the beginning of conversions to the Seaway cause because of Eisenhower. That same month, Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, the chairman of the Republican Campaign Committee, switched from being an aggressive opponent to a loyal defender on the basis of the security issue.¹¹¹ But there was more to this conversion than what the newspapers reported. Eisenhower viewed Dirksen as a key player for his program in the Senate. So he invited the Senator to breakfast one morning in early January and “talked Seaway to him alone for two hours,” after which Dirksen decided to back the Wiley bill.¹¹²

Here was Eisenhower relying on more than his aura. He made it abundantly clear in his legislative meetings that he would be “scrapping and fighting to get what is best for [the] mass” and if that included personally pounding the drums for his own legislation, he was willing to do it.¹¹³ The Seaway, he said, is going to be done “like death and taxes” and he proved his willingness to fight his own battles not only by winning over Dirksen, but by lobbying personally on several occasions to win over support.¹¹⁴

Homer Gruenther, the Assistant to the Deputy Assistant to the President and member of the Legislative Liaison Office, got to witness this intervention firsthand. Gruenther was the officer assigned

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in “Seaway Support Grows in Senate,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 1954.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ “Enmity to Seaway Ended by Dirksen,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1954.

¹¹² Mabee, *The Seaway Story*, 165.

¹¹³ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on May 3, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, L-13(2) May 3, 1954 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹¹⁴ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on April 12, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Box No. 1, L-13(1) April 12, 1954 Legislative Meeting, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

to actively back and drum up support for the Seaway measure in Congress and as such had a lot of contact with Congressmen on the subject.¹¹⁵ He had been talking to Senator Fredrick Payne of Maine when the Senator mentioned how much he admired Sherman Adams, the Assistant to the President. Gruenther wasted no time in writing to Adams, asking him if “he admires you enough to vote for the St. Lawrence Seaway Treaty – and do you think you could ask him?”¹¹⁶ A few days later, Senator Payne got a letter, not from Sherman Adams, but from President Eisenhower himself, who outlined in detail the various reasons for Administration support of the Seaway.¹¹⁷ When the Wiley bill passed the Senate, Payne’s vote was among those who pushed it through.¹¹⁸

Eisenhower proved he could also be more subtle in influencing support. Admiral Arthur Radford’s letter, quoted above, arrived in Senator Ferguson’s mailbox just days before the vote was scheduled to take place, ostensibly in response to Ferguson’s inquiry for an opinion about the security issue from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In fact, the initiative had been all Eisenhower’s and he worked through his subordinates to let them know that he was getting a strong statement from the top brass of the military to support their case.¹¹⁹

Despite the success this brought, personal attention by Eisenhower to every stubborn Senator or Representative would have been infeasible. Instead, he, in the words of railroad executive Guy L. Brown who gave his support over to the Seaway in 1954, “demonstrated repeatedly a calming reliance upon the traditions of true party-statesmanship.”¹²⁰ Such a phrase illustrates Eisenhower’s efforts perfectly.

What had kept the Seaway proposals locked up in both Houses was, by and large, a crippling regionalism. Those Congressmen, regardless of party, who came from areas that were anti-Seaway voted

¹¹⁵ Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larsen, eds. *The Eisenhower Administration*, 265.

¹¹⁶ Homer Gruenther to Sherman Adams, January 14, 1954, in Robert L. Branyan and Larsen, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration*, 265.

¹¹⁷ Dwight Eisenhower to Fredrick Payne, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹¹⁸ “Roll-Call of Senate Vote Passing Seaway Measure,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1954.

¹¹⁹ Note found in, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Box No. 8, St. Lawrence Seaway (Legis.), Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹²⁰ Guy L. Brown to Dwight Eisenhower, February 14, 1954, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 697, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1954 (2) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

against it, while similarly those Congressmen who came from areas that stood to benefit from its construction voted for it. The neutral areas, such as the western, Pacific coast and middle South states were either caught in the middle or, more often, swayed by the powerful railroad lobbies. Eisenhower and his Administration recognized the key to pulling the Seaway through would be to make it a party issue. All that needed to be done was to convert enough Republicans to the issue along party lines to supplement the guaranteed regional votes, both Democrat and Republican, to get the necessary majority. Given Republican control of both Houses, there were plenty of Congressmen ripe for conversion.

This policy put many legislators in a bind. "I got quite a kick out the ribbing the Governor gave Glenn," reported one Robert Bonnell, referring to meeting between Sherman Adams and Senators James Glenn Beall and John Butler, both from Maryland and both Republican. "Governor Adams knows only too well that the Seaway measure puts John and Glenn, and the Maryland Congressmen, 'on the spot,'" he continued, because the Senators, while ironclad opponents of the Seaway because of their constituency in the port of Baltimore, now suddenly found themselves in opposition to their own party. Bonnell evidently enjoyed the Senator's conundrum, but noted that the Seaway case still was not strong enough "to justify them in committing political hari kari" by supporting it.¹²¹

The Senate would be the first true test of this party dragnet to secure passage. The Wiley bill come out of committee with minimal pressure in 1953 and onto a Senate floor that had been prepared admirably by Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft, also head of the Republican Policy Committee. Taft was so dominate in the Committee that that "the custom [was] to consider Taft as the policy committee."¹²² Fortunately, he was a Seaway supporter, but more importantly, he was an Administration supporter, telling others that "when our party controls the White House most of the Republican policy is made there."¹²³ Though he died in July of 1953, Taft did an able job of welding together a strong, pro-

¹²¹ Robert O. Bonnell to Wilton B. Persons, January 10, 1954, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1953-1961, Box No. 696, OF 155-D-1 Inland Waterways St. Lawrence Waterway 1954 (1) fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹²² William S. White, *The Taft Story* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 61, quoted in Harry R. Mahood, *The St. Lawrence Seaway Bill of 1954*, microfilm, 41.

¹²³ White, *The Taft Story*, p. 215, quoted in *Ibid.*

Administration Republican party in the Senate, which proved receptive to the idea of a party sponsored-Seaway.

Even still, the Wiley bill passed the Senate on January 20th, 1954 with an even number of Republicans and Democrats supporting it.¹²⁴ But importantly, the strategy had worked, as the Republican's could count among their votes for the bill Senators from New England, New Jersey and the Rockies.¹²⁵ Part of the success was the strategic expediting of several other hydropower projects in key areas. "We are so badly in need of four additional votes," Homer Gruenther wrote to Sherman Adams, "that we are about ready to offer arms, legs, "Passamaquoddies", or whatever else is necessary to get them."¹²⁶ While body parts never went down in the official records, William Knowland, who had succeeded Taft as the Republican majority leader, stood up on the day of the final vote and announced that the bill allocating \$3 billion dollars to the surveying of Passamaquoddy Bay for potential hydroelectric power in upper New England had just passed the Foreign Relations Committee.¹²⁷ During the same session, the government promised funds to help develop the upper Colorado River, which won votes in the West, and the Mississippi Valley, which was incentive for many Southern senators to consider switching sides.¹²⁸

The fight in the House of Representatives would not go so smoothly. While Representative George Dondero of Michigan had introduced the Seaway measure, known as the Dondero bill, to the house a full fourteen days earlier than Wiley had in the Senate, it had been mired in the Committee on Public Works for a year, only to be brought up for consideration once the Senate had made a decision.¹²⁹ The move probably frustrated Dondero to no end, as he was the chair of the Committee and had to watch

¹²⁴ "Roll-Call of Senate Vote Passing Seaway Measure," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1954.

¹²⁵ Dwight Eisenhower to Fredrick Payne, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Eisenhower Presidential Library; "Seaway Support Grows in Senate," *The New York Times*, January 19, 1954; Clayton Knowles, "Seaway Foes Told Senate Back Bill," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1954.

¹²⁶ Homer Gruenther to Sherman Adams, January 14, 1954, in Robert L. Branyan and Larsen, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration*, 265.

¹²⁷ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting 3/13/53 (continued), in Gibson and Kesaris, ed. *Minutes and Documents of the Cabinet Meetings of President Eisenhower, 1953-1961*, Gettysburg College Library, microfilm.

¹²⁸ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 259.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

in languish for over a year before anything decisive happened. But once the Senate ruled in favor of Wiley's bill, Dondero acted quickly and favorably reported out the bill within two weeks, with only a token opposition.¹³⁰

Things got stickier when the Dondero bill reached the next phase; passing the Rules Committee, which was dominated by anti-Seaway Representatives such as Joseph Martin of Massachusetts and Leo Allen of Illinois, both from Eisenhower's own party but opposed because of their regional interests.¹³¹ Despite many Republicans admitting that they might "have to go along" because of the position of the Administration, the party dragnet had hit a snag.¹³² Seaway opponents fully realized that the only thing they really had to beat was the clock. Canada was anxious to get started by 1955 and was impatiently watching as the FPC struck down appeals throughout 1954.¹³³ If the opposition could stall the issue in committee until Congress adjourned, the chances of it being taken back up, or even being an issue, in the next session were slim.

The Rules Committee had the first delay handed to them, albeit at a rather steep cost. On March 1st, 1954 several Puerto Rican Nationalists appeared on the balcony of the House chamber and opened fire with sub-machine guns into the officials below, wounding five. Of those five wounded, two were on the House Committee on Public Works which was scheduled to go before the Rules Committee to testify. Dondero postponed the testimony until they, Representative George Fallon of Maryland and Representative Clifford Davis, both Democrats, could convalesce and return to their duties.¹³⁴ When the two returned at the end of the month, the Rules Committee implemented its own stall tactics, by having only two hours of hearings before postponing them until April 1st, so Representative Allen could campaign back home. It then postponed a final vote until after the Easter recess later on in April.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Ibid., 256; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 302.

¹³¹ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 257.

¹³² "House Unit Backs Seaway Bill, 23-6," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1954.

¹³³ Chevrier, *The St. Lawrence Seaway*, 50.

¹³⁴ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 257; "Fallon Back in House: He is First of Five Wounded Members to Resume Duties," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1954.

¹³⁵ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 257.

The delays proved frustrating, but Eisenhower kept up the pressure in his legislative meetings. Majority Leader Halleck, who initially opposed the bill but found he had to bow to Eisenhower's pressure in the meetings, promised to "keep [the] heat on" in the Rules Committee, which he was also a part of.¹³⁶ As they delays dragged, he was instructed to "put screws on" the Committee to get some action, but his overall outlook was positive. "When something is important, we'll deliver," he promised Eisenhower.¹³⁷

The pressure paid off and the Dondero bill reported out of committee with a recommendation to pass on April 29th, but this put it right in the way of another travail.¹³⁸ Representative Charles Brownson, an Indiana Republican, had been agitating for an amendment to the Dondero bill since before it reported out of the Rules Committee. The bill as it stood, he argued, placed too much of a burden on the Treasury. The self-liquidation provision as no more than a window dressing, as it proposed to sell bonds to the United States Treasury as a means to achieve this liquidation. The bonds bought by the Treasury, Brownson argued, would still show up on the national debt, which in his mind defeated the point of having it be self-liquidating. "I intend to offer an amendment" that "will provide for sale of revenue bonds to the public," he wrote in the minority opinion of the Committee on Public Works report.¹³⁹

Advocates of the Seaway hated the idea. "This method of financing would, as a practical certainty, make it impossible to raise the necessary U.S. construction funds and would thus defeat U.S. participation," declared Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Association, the chief lobby group for the Seaway.¹⁴⁰ It was viewed primarily as a last-gasp measure to make certain the defeat of United States participation; certainly the anti-Seaway coalition viewed it that way, as the amendment proposal gained endorsement

¹³⁶ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 29, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹³⁷ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on April 12, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹³⁸ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 257.

¹³⁹ House Committee on Public Works, *Report of the Committee on Public Works on S.2150 A Bill Providing for Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation to Construct Part of the St. Lawrence Seaway in United States Territory and for Other Purposes*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953, H. Rep. 1215, 117.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum for Sherman Adams, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Eisenhower Presidential Library.

from the Association of American Railroads and the National Coal Association, both the big time business interest against the Seaway.¹⁴¹

Brownson thought otherwise, holding that he had no objection to the Seaway project, just its methods of financing, and that public sale would raise more than enough money as bonds could be bought by anyone, including large companies such as the steel industries with definite interests in the Seaway. “I’d rather have Secretary Humphrey reach into his Hanna corporation pocket than into his Treasury pocket,” he told the *New York Times*.¹⁴² Still, the prevailing opinion was that the Brownson Amendment was “an underwater torpedo to sink the Administration program” and it was in Ike’s best interest to come out against it.¹⁴³

Eisenhower’s public face remained non-committal, expressing only a desire that the bill “will come to my desk in a form which will make possible the successful carrying out of this Country’s part in the Seaway project.”¹⁴⁴ Privately, he agreed with the assessment of Dondero, Ferguson and other pro-Seaway Congressmen that it was a sabotage attempt and ordered Halleck to kill it.¹⁴⁵ When word got out the President was unhappy with the idea, the measure went down smoking.

Final passage still was not guaranteed. The House was larger and had a more diverse range of opinions in the Senate and many of the opposition states had significant representation. Homer Gruenther, ever on the prowl for ways to make the Administration’s presence felt, suggested early on in the year that “this would be a good piece of legislation for [Illinois Congressman] Arends to try out the effectiveness of his Whip organization.”¹⁴⁶ Party was going to be just as crucial a tool in the House as it had been in the Senate. Later in the year, at the beginning of May, Gruenther reported that his spot checks on state leaders

¹⁴¹ “To All Members of the House of Representatives,” poster, Central Files, General Files, GF 129-B-5, Box No. 1014, 1956, 129-B-6 St. Lawrence Seaway 1954 fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁴² Quoted in “House Unit Backs Seaway Bill, 23-6,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 1954.

¹⁴³ Press Release Statement, April 18, 1954, Central Files, General Files, GF 129-B-5, Box No. 1014, 1956, 129-B-6 St. Lawrence Seaway 1954 fol., Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁴⁴ Murray Snyder to James Hagerty, April 28, 1954, memorandum, White House Central Files, Official Files, 1954, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁴⁵ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change: 1953-1956, The White House Years*, 302; Minutes for Legislative Meeting on March 29, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁴⁶ Homer Gruenther to Wilton Persons, February 23, 1954, in Branyan and Larsen, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration*, 267.

had been optimistic and that so far “we will pick up more Democrat votes than we will lose from the Republican side.”¹⁴⁷ The terms “lose” and “pick up” were somewhat misleading; as the House had yet to vote on a Seaway proposal, so Gruenther was largely indicating where the votes stood a good chance of falling. Again, Democratic votes could fall where they would, it was just hoped that the party policy could rope in enough of the Republican’s to tip the balance.

The president also discussed the House disposition with the legislative leaders, who were busy logrolling and tallying up the possible votes. Florida’s vote might split if the Administration put some elbow grease behind demands for a Florida canal, and the Passamaquoddy promise could work in the House as well as the Senate.¹⁴⁸ Regardless of these individual efforts, the final result was in still in doubt until the final call on May 6th. And again, there must have been an audible sigh of relief from the thousands of Seaway activists, Congressmen, and lobbyists when the final tally was announced – the Dondero bill had passed, 241 to 158.¹⁴⁹

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“Mr. President, five of your predecessors advocated and endorsed the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway. It has been delayed 30 or 40 years, and now under your great leadership this mighty project of the North American Continent is to become a reality.”¹⁵⁰

Thus spoke Representative George Dondero on May 13th, 1954, moments before President Eisenhower would sit down to sign the Wiley-Dondero bill into law. Senator Alexander Wiley echoed these thoughts, saying that “history will now record that at long last the dream –yes, the hope, of

¹⁴⁷ Homer Gruenther to Wilton Persons, May 9, 1954, Files of Consultant and Administrative Assistant to the President 1953-1955 (Gerald S. Morgan), Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁴⁸ Minutes for Legislative Meeting on May 4, 1954, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Legislative Meetings Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁴⁹ Willoughby, *The St. Lawrence Waterway: A Study in Politics and Diplomacy*, 258.

¹⁵⁰ Remarks of the President, Senator Wiley, Senator Ferguson and Representative Dondero at the Signing of the Wiley-Dondero Act, May 13, 1954, in *St. Lawrence Seaway Manual: A Compilation of Documents on the Great Lakes Seaway Project and Correlated Power Development*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Doc. 165, 166.

countless millions is being fulfilled.”¹⁵¹ Melodramatic, perhaps, but melodrama fitting for two massive breakthroughs; the final decision about United States participation in the St. Lawrence Seaway and the first major legislative victory for Eisenhower’s Administration.

It had not been an easy victory and Ike had been far from fully engaged through some of the struggle. He had had his doubts, especially when it came to the possible costs quoted to him by the opposition, but he had entered 1954 with the Seaway as a firm objective. Five months of legislative wrangling later, he had achieved his goal. The Administration could now add a large public works project to its resume and the steel industry of the Midwest would be assured a steady supply of iron ore from which to produce the goods that kept America safe.

Despite this obvious moment of triumph for Eisenhower, history has not been kind to his record on the Seaway. Administration support has been taken for granted and Ike himself written off as simply the lucky inheritor of a set of factors that conspired through 1953 and 1954 to put a Seaway bill on his desk. In many ways, though, the opposite was true. The set of favorable developments of ’53 were lucky to have Eisenhower behind the desk to help them mean something.

Canadian determination to “go it alone,” the Labrador ore strike and the Wiley bill’s palatable cost were certainly massive boons to the Seaway cause, but none proved decisive in Congress. They did not in any way undermine the opposing state and railroad interests, or force them to awkwardly adapt. Their traditional argument of cost still held weight and they welcomed the Labrador strike and Canadian operational independence as an increase in business to eastern ports and railroads. The issue of “having a voice” in the control of the Seaway was simply a non-issue for the opposition and they presented it as such.

Where such arguments were not non-issues was the White House. While Ike’s methods of evaluating the measure may have meant it lacked his immediate support, he got behind the Seaway once he saw its value to national security and as possible bragging rights for his Administration. His support in

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

national security was particularly critical, as without it the argument would have foundered for general lack of weight and testimonials.

When it came down to the final stages, Eisenhower also proved himself a valuable ally “on the ground,” as it were, pushing the measure through Congress. He and his legislative leaders realized that by making the Seaway party policy, they could use the Republican majority as a dragnet to scoop up valuable votes in both Houses. This tactic, while ultimately successful, did not preclude Eisenhower from intervening personally in a number of instances to boost the Seaway’s chance of success.

In sum, Dwight Eisenhower was the only thing truly different about the Seaway fight at the start of his term. He was the one who could, and did, upset the status quo that would have doomed United States involvement to defeat. History might not have, but contemporaries amply recognized this. So it is only fitting that one of the great locks he helped make a reality bears his name and continues to dutifully serve the interests of its country to this day.

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