



NATIONAL ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

John J. Parisi

February 6, 1985

at

Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, D.C.

Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross (National Archives employee)

Basic summary abstract prepared by Donnie Eichhorst (National Archives volunteer)

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John J. Parisi. Washington, D.C. February 6, 1985. Interviewed by
Rodney A. Ross.

Since 1981 John Parisi has served as Minority Counsel on the Subcommittee on Government Information, Justice and Agriculture of the House Government Operations Committee.

Parisi discussed his involvement in Archives matters for both his "patron," Rep. Thomas Kindness and for Rep. Frank Horton. The bulk of the interview dealt with the Archives independence question from the time of the March 7, 1984, hearings held by Rep. Jack Brooks' subcommittee on Legislation and National Security through the August 1984 work of House-Senate staff members who attempted to help reconcile differences between the House and Senate bills.

Parisi described his work as a committee staff member. He told of both subcommittee and full committee treatment of the independence measure.

Parisi talked about Rep. Kindness' position of opposing Archives independence while supporting the idea of giving the National Archives the authority to make an independent budget approach to Congress.

In discussing the Archives bill Parisi related how a preliminary House draft had provided for the return of the records management authority from GSA to the National Archives.

The interview, approximately 45 minutes in length on two sides of one cassette, was conducted in the Rayburn House Office Building.

Abstract of interview with John J. Parisi in Washington, D.C., on February 6, 1985.

Interviewer: Rodney A. Ross

Tape length: One 60-minute cassette (all of side 1 and part of side 2)

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Side 1

QUESTION: Biographical background?

ANSWER: John Parisi was born on April 11, 1949, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was educated in the Kalamazoo public schools. He earned a B.A. in history from Kalamazoo College. He received his legal education from the University of Detroit and from Wayne State University. He graduated from the latter institution in 1976.

Parisi briefly practiced law in Detroit before coming to Washington to work for his hometown congressman, Gary Brown (Republican, Michigan 3rd District). In January 1979 after Brown left office Parisi became legislative director for Rep. Thomas N. Kindness (Republican, Ohio 8th District).

Parisi continued to work for Rep. Kindness and in 1981 became the Minority Counsel to the Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights of the House Government Operations Committee. Since the 96th Congress Rep. Kindness has been the ranking Republican on that subcommittee. The subcommittee's name was changed to reflect an expansion of its jurisdiction in 1983 to the Subcommittee on Government Information, Justice and Agriculture. Parisi has served for three and a half years as subcommittee Minority Counsel.

QUESTION: Clarification of relationship between Rep. Kindness and Rep. Frank Horton?

ANSWER: Under the rules of the House each chairman of a subcommittee, as well as the ranking minority member of each House subcommittee, is entitled to designate an individual on the staff payroll of the committee to be the designee of that individual congressman. Rep. Kindness, in his capacity as ranking minority member of the Government Information Subcommittee, designated Parisi for employment on the Government Operations Committee staff, subject to approval of the committee chairman. For committee work Parisi is principally accountable to Rep. Kindness. Rep. Horton is the ranking Republican on the full committee; Parisi also fulfills responsibilities to him. These include doing general legal work on matters that come before the full committee and assisting the General Counsel and Staff Director for the minority, Steve Daniels.

It is not unusual for minority staff members in Congress to find themselves working both sides of an issue. In the case of Archives independence Rep. Kindness took a position diametrically opposed to that of Rep. Horton. Thus Parisi not only represented Rep. Kindness' position, he was also called upon to explain fully the issue of Archives independence to all minority members of the committee.

In meetings on the Archives legislation Parisi made it clear that although he worked for Rep. Kindness, Rep. Horton had given him responsibility to be lead minority staff counsel on the issue. This was of special importance since Rep. Horton's subcommittee had jurisdiction over the bill at the subcommittee level.

QUESTION: In the past couple of years what have been your responsibilities regarding the National Archives?

ANSWER: The subcommittee for Government Information has jurisdiction over those portions of Title 44 of the U.S. Code that pertain to the National Archives. The subcommittee also has oversight jurisdiction.

The Government Operations Committee has general oversight responsibilities for all government agencies. It has legislative responsibility for very few, but one of them in the National Archives.

The Government Information subcommittee has been actively overseeing Archives problems since 1979. It began by looking into problems regarding both the National Archives Trust Fund and Archives preservation concerns. This was the period when the old Landsberg department store building was being used for storage of Archives printed records.

Oversight continued during 1981 and 1982 at a time when the National Archives was faced with massive budget cuts.

The subcommittee chairman, Rep. Glenn English, indicated he was inclined to support independence for the National Archives. Rep. Kindness took a contrary position.

Rep. Jack Brooks, who was both chairman of the full committee and chairman of the subcommittee on Legislation and National Security, viewed as a reorganization matter the issue of the separation of the National Archives from the General Services Administration (GSA). This meant that the issue would fall under the jurisdiction of Rep. Brooks' subcommittee.

Because of Parisi's position as Minority Counsel to the Government Information subcommittee and in view of his expertise with the issue he was asked by John Duncan, then Staff Director, to assist in the preparations for the hearing on the independence legislation. Parisi was also asked to assist in preparations for mark-up at both the subcommittee and full committee levels.

QUESTION: What background did you do for the March 7, 1984, hearing held by Rep. Brooks' subcommittee?

ANSWER: Parisi did the same kind of background work a Minority Counsel does for any hearing on a piece of proposed legislation. His job was to consult with the majority staff, to determine who the witnesses would be, and to persuade the majority to invite persons the minority felt could establish points that needed to be placed on the record. In this way the committee members would then be more fully informed on the ramifications of what the legislation would do.

Parisi prepared a background memo to be sent to minority members on the subcommittee. The memo provided background history on the National Archives and on those matters that had led to the independence legislation. It also included a brief series of the bill's highlights. The bill was more than just a reorganization bill separating the National Archives from GSA. Substantive changes dealt with the authority of the Archivist and his relationship to other agency heads, etc.

Parisi wanted questions asked of the witnesses as to the wisdom of Congress enacting these provisions.

QUESTION: In looking at the published hearings I didn't see a formal vote. Was there a vote taken?

ANSWER: No. The process is that a hearing is held on a bill. Witness present testimony, either supporting or opposing. They answer questions. Frequently either there is not time for members to ask all the questions they wish, or questions come up after the hearing is over. In such cases questions are submitted in writing to the witnesses and their subsequent responses come back to the committee. Parisi then gave an example of a question by Rep. Horton.

After the hearing is over the chairman has to make a decision to go ahead. The next step would be a subcommittee markup. On the Archives independence question the decision was affirmative and so the bill went to subcommittee markup. It's at that meeting the members take a vote on the bill.

In the course of deliberation, amendments may be offered to the bill at the subcommittee level. There may be recorded votes on those amendments. Sometimes a bill is so noncontroversial that a hearing and markup are scheduled for the same time. That was not the case with the Archives independence bill.

QUESTION: Was there a full committee meeting and markup?

ANSWER: Yes. The subcommittee hearing was on March 7, 1984. The subcommittee markup was in April. The following week in April the full committee met to consider the bill.

At full committee the members have the opportunity to offer amendments to the bill and to seek a vote on those amendments. In this case there were some clarifying amendments offered by Rep. Brooks. These dealt with technical problems with the bill that other agencies had brought to the committee's attention. The committee didn't deal with all of these amendments.

Rep. Kindness voiced opposition to the bill at the full committee meeting. He indicated he would offer a substitute when the bill came to the floor.

QUESTION: Was Rep. Kindness a minority of one?

ANSWER: Rep. Kindness was the only member to speak against the bill. The bill was voted out on a voice vote. The transcript indicated "ayes" or "chorus of ayes" and "nos." There is no identification of members who voted "no".

Parisi was seated behind Rep. Kindness and thus was unable to see members in front. Someone in the audience thought they saw another Republican vote "no". The record shows only a voice vote by the full committee.

QUESTION: Were the subcommittee hearings held in the House Government Operations Committee hearing room?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: Was it a packed room, as far as the audience?

ANSWER: It was fairly packed, but not standing room only. There were a lot of witnesses and the hearings were held in both the morning and afternoon.

QUESTION: How many members were present?

Parisi couldn't recall the number. On the Republican side Rep. Horton and Rep. William F. Clinger, Jr., were present for most of the hearings. On the Democratic side Rep. Brooks chaired the session; Parisi didn't remember which other Democrats were there. The print for the subcommittee hearings would indicate how many members were present at the beginning, but not the times congressmen came and left. (For the Senate hearings such information is given in the printed transcripts.) An indication of who's present can be got by carefully reading the transcript and seeing whom the chairman calls on for questions.

QUESTION: Were the two markup sessions also held in the hearing room?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: Was anyone from the general public present at the markups?

ANSWER: Yes. Markups are like other hearings and meetings. By House rule they're required to be open. Only in very limited circumstances are hearings and meetings closed.

QUESTION: Were there any agencies besides IRS and Justice that voiced concerns?

ANSWER: GSA continued to express the feeling that there was no need for independence. GSA was also concerned about such things as whether there'd be a need to amend the Executive Order on classification of national security information and whether the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) would be moved out of GSA and into the National Archives.

By the time the bill came to the floor the committee had decided to leave ISOO where it was at GSA.

GSA's opposition to the bill was really more in the form of "think about this before you make the change."

There were other agencies that commented to OMB through their usual process, such as the CIA, but never sent a separate letter to the committee.

QUESTION: What preparations did you do when the bill finally came to the House floor?

ANSWER: Parisi replied that along with the majority staff he made sure the amendments were prepared for the chairman to offer which would make necessary changes in the bill before the House and Senate tried to reconcile differences in their respective bills. Parisi cited the question of whether a provision should be included in the bill to deal with the problems the IRS had with it. Other matters dealt with the ISOO question and with Trust Fund authority. The staff went back through the House and Senate bills and identified differing issues in the two versions.

At the same time Parisi was working on these considerations, he was also preparing an amendment in the nature of a substitute for Rep. Kindness. Rep. Kindness was generally supportive of giving the Archivist direct statutory authority, as in Title 44, but he did not supporting separating the National Archives from GSA and making it an independent agency. Rep. Kindness supported a provision that would have given the National Archives a direct budget line to Congress. Rep. Kindness' idea was based on the statute that set up the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as an independent commission within the Department of Energy (DOE).

FERC's budget is submitted as a part of the DOE budget, but there is a provision that states if the budget FERC requested is different from what DOE requests for it then FERC can submit its initial request directly to Congress.

Parisi discussed what a "subunit" of an agency needs to do to get what it wants, including "under the table" methods of informing appropriate staffers.

Side 2

Parisi pointed out the advantage FERC had in its official pipeline to Congress on budget requests. What Rep. Kindness did was to take the FERC language and apply it to the National Archives. Thus if the National Archives couldn't get what it wanted from GSA or OMB, it could have gone directly to Congress.

The drive for complete independence had gone too far by the time Rep. Kindness brought his ideas to the House. The idea of independent access to Congress had been proposed by the Smithsonian study, but Rep. Brooks felt a case could be made for full independence. Rep. Horton supported Rep. Brooks.

QUESTION: How did it happen that Steve Daniels eventually supplanted you as main Republican staff person on the bill?

ANSWER: Initially, Daniels was in a difficult position because his wife worked at the National Archives. Daniels felt it would be improper for him to work as lead counsel. John Duncan was Staff Director at that time and Daniels was General Minority Counsel for the committee. Just as Rep. Kindness was Parisi's patron, so Rep. Frank Horton was Daniels' patron.

Because Daniels thought it improper for him to work on the Archives independence bill, John Duncan asked Parisi to deal with the issue. Another potential problem was resolved when Rep. Kindness okayed Parisi's working on the bill from the proponents' side.

Parisi told how he handled the matter and stated that he had no strong convictions for either side.

Parisi saw his job as keeping congressmen informed of potential ramifications on such questions as the transfer of employees and appropriations and the possible transfer of records management authority back to the National Archives. Two years earlier the GSA administrator had taken some records management functions from the National Archives and had given them to GSA's Office of Information Resources Management (IRM). Initially the way the bill was written would have provided for all those functions that had been transferred to Frank J. Carr two years earlier would have been given back to the National Archives. The Representatives decided to maintain the status quo.

Parisi needed to spend time with attorneys from GSA and the staff from IRM and the National Archives to make sure the language of the House bill reflected the status quo and separation of responsibilities under existing delegations of authority. In essence this meant rewriting sections of Chapter 29 and Title 44.

QUESTION: What period are you talking about now?

ANSWER: Prior to the subcommittee markup. The process, however, went on along the way. The House wasn't sure what kinds of things the Senate would do in response to concerns expressed by the REagan administration.

Once the Senate passed its bill Parisi sat down and identified all the points of difference between the bills. He listed the differences and discussed ways to resolve them and discussed at what stages in the process resolution should take place. Some things were taken out of the House bill, like the ISOO transfer.

QUESTION: Was that also in the Senate version?

ANSWER: No. It was never in the Senate version.

QUESTION: Did you continue to be actively involved with the independence question after House passage of the bill?

ANSWER: Yes. After House passage House and Senate staffers got together and identified the differences between the two bills. They went through the various items and noted major and minor issues. They came to some tentative agreements prior to the August recess. The staff members were fairly optimistic that most issues could be resolved.

One problem involved the granting to the Archivist authority to make the final determination of what was an agency record. People in the Senate weren't unsympathetic, but they felt the Reagan administration would strongly oppose the provision. They feared the provision might cause the President to veto the bill.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

John J. Parisi

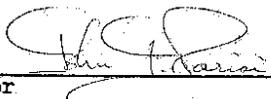
In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I,

John J. Parisi of Washington, D.C.
(name) (city and state)

do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of a personal interview conducted on February 6, 1985 at the Rayburn H.O.B.

in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the National Archives. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The tape recording shall be available to all researchers upon its being accessioned by the National Archives.
- (2) The transcript shall be available to those researchers who have access to the tape recording, as soon as the National Archives' processing schedule allows sufficient time for transcript preparation.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the National Archives to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives.


Donor

February 6, 1985

Date


Archivist of the United States

February 6, 1985
Date