

Interview with Rep. H. Carl Andersen (R-MN)

5 June 1959

General remarks: Impressed by his self-confidence and sense of responsibility—capable man.

Why on Appropriations Committee? “Some people say Ways and Means or Rules is a more important committee, but the Appropriations Committee is the most powerful committee in the House. It’s the most powerful committee in the Congress. This is where all the money starts rolling.... The chairman of the Appropriations Committee is the third most powerful man in government—the president, the Speaker, and the chairman of Appropriations. Only the Speaker has more power in the Congress.” He said this with an acute and active awareness of the likelihood of his succeeding Rep. John Taber (R-NY), ranking member on Appropriations—“When I take John Taber’s place, if I ever do....”

“A man spends two terms here before he gets Appropriations.” He was rather dogmatic about this, as if he accepted it fully as tradition.

He says that Rep. Robert H. Michel (R-IL) was put on his Agriculture subcommittee, “Because Mr. Taber knew he was opposed to my views. He didn’t consult me at all.... It was a lack of courtesy on Mr. Taber’s part.” This was one point where he said that *if he were Chairman*, he would consult with the subcommittee chairman.

How get on Appropriations Committee? He was one of twelve applicants for the job, and only three were chosen—“They know who they want. After all, I had been here for four years.” The three chosen drew names out of a hat for seniority Ben F. Jensen (R-IA) one, H. Carl Andersen (R-MN) two, Henry C. Dworshak (R-ID) three.

How learn ropes? “You sit there and listen, day after day, year after year.” He took Michel (first year on committee) on trip with him around to several places, even though Michel didn’t agree with him.

Re. subcommittee markup: “The Chairman prepares the figures and if there’s agreement, we go right along. If there’s a lot of controversy, we put the item aside and go on. Then after a day or so we may have a list of ten controversial items. We give and take and pound them down till we get agreement.” And he spoke of a “gentleman’s agreement” not to oppose this agreement.

Usually this agreed upon position goes right through full committee—William E. Morris, Andersen staff aide. “If there’s anything the members don’t like, it’s someone who keeps quiet in committee and then pops up on the floor with an amendment.” This idea is all of a piece with the new strategy of when to tip your hand—sometimes it should not be too early, but it ought not to be late either.

“The Subcommittee on Agriculture has more power over agriculture [policy] than the legislative committee on agriculture. We look at every program every year.... Why we’ve

started many important legislative programs right here in this room [the subcommittee's room]—the watershed program, etc.” The legislative committee may not do anything for three or four years on a program—the idea that continuous control adds to policy intervention

Rural Electrification Administration (REA): They are “rephasing,” and it does not take as much personnel as when you are starting a program like Soil Conservation Service (SCS)—“REA has passed its peak. You don’t need to wet nurse them any more.” SCS is spreading.

Re. Bureau of the Budget (BB): “We just take the Budget Bureau’s figure as a place to begin.” It’s a creature of the Congress—it has been taking a lot of authority it shouldn’t have—i.e. the “no new starts” edict this year on the watershed program—“that was contrary to the will of Congress.”

Re. conference committee: The group tries to meet before going into conference, but they are not bound at all—it is a “psychological cold war”—sometimes the conferees refuse a conference, i.e. “plant their feet”—they may take it back to the House for new instructions, if the House votes it through again

“We do as good a job as any group of human beings can do. It’s all more or less guesswork (wouldn’t you say Walt [William Morris])... After you sit on the committee for fifteen years, though, you know these men and these programs. You become experts on them. The thing just flows along. It gets into a pattern. Believe it or not, we do a pretty good job.”

Re. inside information: “We get letters from people telling us where the bugs are in the program.”

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM E. MORRIS, STAFF AIDE TO REPRESENTATIVE
H. CARL ANDERSEN, CLOSED PER CONDITIONS OF DEED OF GIFT
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