

Interview with Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-MA)

April 1964

Regarding Rep. Frank Smith (D-MS) – “Whitten couldn’t carry his shoe laces” [reference to Rep. Jamie Whitten (D-MS)].

“There’s not much rapport with the leadership. They respect Mr. Cannon [Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO)], but they don’t consider him a good Democrat. He’s not a party man; he’s not reliable; they don’t feel they can trust him. On things like foreign aid where the leadership is really concerned, Cannon won’t pay any attention to them anyway. So there’s no rapport there. The contact is all on an individual basis. The leadership will get in touch with individual members – mostly with regard to special projects. McCormack [Speaker John McCormack (D-MA)] will call individual members of the Committee regarding public works’ projects that some members have spoken to him about. But on spending in general the leadership doesn’t put any pressure on the Committee. Oh, maybe on foreign aid; they do try to talk to individual members on that. But they can’t do much there. That’s a tough [sub]committee to deal with. There isn’t much rapport.”

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has always come before the [Independent Offices] Subcommittee, but this year Cannon took it away and gave it to the Legislative Subcommittee. “It seemed to me that’s where it belongs anyway. But Al Thomas [Independent Offices Subcommittee Chairman Albert Thomas (D-TX)] was upset about it. He was terribly upset. Mr. Cannon came to me and said he didn’t know why Albert was so upset and hoped it wouldn’t get any worse. I told him I didn’t think he had to worry about Al taking it to the full Committee. If he had, he would have lost. All the Republicans would have voted present. They would have refrained from voting so as not to get involved. Thomas has a lot of friends on the Committee, but George Mahon [D-TX] and [Robert L.F.] Sikes [D-FL] and that crowd would have gone along with Cannon and Al couldn’t have won. I don’t know why he was so upset. We always gave them all the money they wanted anyway and, Steed [Legislative Subcommittee Chairman Tom Steed (D-OK)] will do the same thing. Of course, Thomas always built up the Comptroller General and pointed with pride. The whole thing has died down now.”

Regarding difference between Rep. Ben F. Jensen (R-IA) and former Rep. John Taber (R-NY) as ranking Committee member: No change – “The philosophy is still the same, of cutting the budget.” “One reason there’s been no change is because John Taber in his last years was slipping anyway. He wasn’t as sharp as he used to be.” The point is a good one – change was not abrupt; it was very gradual.

“Taber commanded more respect among the Republicans than Jensen does – that’s the major difference. Taber was a very popular guy, and Jensen is popular, too. But Taber was a much sharper guy. Jensen always wants to cut – but his arguments aren’t always too good. I think Cannon sort of laughs at Jensen. They have some violent arguments, and they almost come to blows. But Cannon just rides over him. They get very mad at each other – over public power particularly, Cannon is a great public power man and

Jensen is a spokesman for the private power interests – but the next day they are friends again. It was Cannon’s 85th birthday the other day, and Jensen made a nice speech on the floor calling him a great American. One thing you learn around here is not to carry grudges. It’s crazy. I’ve seen people have violent arguments on the floor one day, and the next day they go out to dinner together.”

Regarding Jensen on various subcommittees: He stresses Jensen’s windiness, too. He asks questions “interminably.” He stresses there was no rule “written or unwritten” saying that the ranking minority member would be ex officio. “Jensen took himself off the interior subcommittee [Interior and Related Agencies Subcommittee] because he thought he would be a member of all of them. When he started wandering into some of the [sub]committees, the Chairman [Cannon] said, ‘he’s not a member.’ He [Jensen] was going to make an issue of it, but he would have lost in the full Committee. The Democrats would have lined up solidly against him. He was going to appeal to the full Committee, but he decided against it. Actually, Cannon saved the subcommittees a lot of trouble. Jensen doesn’t know blank from blank on most of these things. On some [sub]committees he would – but not on a lot of them – he would have come in and just wanted to cut, cut personnel and all that – the meat axe approach. And he would have given long speeches – interminably. So Cannon actually helped that way.”

“The *Washington Post* and other newspapers talk about these doddering old men. But he’s a sharp and incisive guy (Cannon). He’s 85, and he’s as sharp as ever. He writes beautifully; he used to be a school teacher. And when he talks he does well, too. He flails those arms around so you have to concentrate on what he’s saying. But if you get real close, he’s got something to say.”

Regarding the end of the Special Deficiencies Subcommittee, Boland sees it as a wise move. “We would probably have given them most of what they wanted.” I can’t remember the wording, but the point was that Cannon was right that in the circumstances of this year, they would have gotten what they wanted. He noted that the session went a long time last year, that many supplementals were waiting and that the deficiencies subcommittee would have been lenient. The labor-HEW bill tackled the deficiencies as well as the regular appropriations in their bill on the floor yesterday, and they put in no money deficiencies. Apropos of this, “he’s a very wise man.” He says the Deficiencies Subcommittee saved a lot of money over the years, but that Cannon could see it was going to be lenient.

He notes that Cannon’s name was on the Wonnies [World War I veterans] discharge petition. This was a four billion dollar bill. He sees it as a political move for back home where the veterans are strong. “It’s like Senator [Hubert] Humphrey says, as soon as you forget about being a Senator for your state and start to be a statesman, you don’t come back any more. So Cannon’s a little political that way.”

He said there had never been a caucus of the Democrats on the Appropriations Committee during his term of office.

He was high in praise of the staff members. He thinks they need more physicists and scientists on the staff, and he says that Cannon would agree to this if such could be found.