

Interview with Rep. Joe Evins (D-TN)

June 12, 1959

How get on Committee?—He was on Veterans Affairs Committee, and had worked up in seniority. Albert A. Gore, from Tennessee, was on Appropriations. He went to the Senate and for a while no Tennessee man was on Appropriations. Finally, a vacancy opened up. The Tennessee delegation met, and decided they had to have a man on Appropriations. Jere Cooper (D-TN) was Chairman of Ways and Means, James P. Priest (D-TN) was Chairman of Interior and Foreign Commerce, etc, and Evins was the logical choice. “I said, ‘No, thanks.’ I was on the VA Committee, and doing very well in seniority—second to the Chairman. They said that I should go on Appropriations—that to be anchorman on Appropriations was more important than being chairman of most other committees.” So Tennessee put him up.

Re. determination of seniority on Committee, he said at first that they drew numbers out of a hat, but then changed and said they voted for him to have first position among newcomers.

Re. questioning in hearings: “Sometimes the information comes easy, and sometimes you have to sit across the table like a prosecutor and twist the answers out of them...It’s our function to ask questions and find out where the frills and the wastefulness are.”

Do constituents understand? “No. They know all the little things you have to do to get elected. But they don’t know the vital and fundamental things you do on the Appropriation Committee. That’s where you (me) have a chance to render real service to the country.” He spoke at great length about this, and said it would be helpful. He told story about Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO)—works all day in committee room on defense problems, and comes out on the floor to relax. Lady sitting in gallery gets him off the floor and blasts him for not being there on the floor all the time.

Re. Appropriation Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO) changing Albert Thomas’s (D-TX) assignment: he (Evins) says it was a functional change wholly, and OK—“no resentment” from the committee—my (Fenno’s) guess is that this is his attitude because he wasn’t hurt.

Conference—give and take—may pass over controversial items first and then come back to them.

Re. Cannon’s functions: 1) selects staff 2) creates subcommittees 3) names subcommittee chairmen 4) sets target dates for end of subcommittee hearings 5) puts people on subcommittees—This all done usually by passing resolution at the beginning of each year.

Re. markup: someone says four million, other says three million, other, 3 ½ million. It’s bargaining etc.—Cannon and [Ranking Appropriations member John] Taber (R-NY)

always there. “Sometimes they inject themselves into the discussion, and sometimes they just listen to the members.”

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MARSHALL, STAFF AIDE TO REP. JOE L. EVINS,
CLOSED PER CONDITIONS OF THE DEED OF GIFT,
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