

Interview with Rep. John J. Flynt, Jr. (D-GA)

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Regarding the Foreign Operations Subcommittee meeting on Foreign Aid in 1964: “Everybody who was going to speak had spoken, but not in specifics. Then Mr. Mahon [Rep. George H. Mahon (D-TX)] said we’ll now hear from Judge Flynt, a fine judge of character and his fellow man, or something like that. Then I proposed an amendment to restore the 500 million dollars. I have never in my life been subjected to such a scathing denunciation as I was subjected to in the next minute. Otto Passman [(D-LA), Chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee] thought that I was going to vote with him. But I had never given him any assurance or said anything to give him that idea in my conversations with him and George Andrews [D-AL]. I don’t remember, and I’m glad I don’t, all the things that he said. Well, after he finished I bore right back at him. Not in the way he had struck at me – and I regret a little bit even answering him – but I tightened my belt a couple of notches and said that I was going to fight and to move heaven and earth then and afterward, in the full Committee and on the floor to sustain the position I had taken.

Regarding Passman: “He lost more than that one vote. He had run roughshod over people and bullied the witnesses and Committee members for so long that he had lost the sympathy and respect of many members of the [Foreign Operations] Subcommittee. He had run that Subcommittee with an iron hand. And he had abused so many members of the subcommittee – with verbal abuse, tongue lashings that cut deep – that he didn’t have the support he might have had. The things he said and the language he used when he left the committee room were worse. I learned a lesson that day I hope I never forget in politics. Never get so mad at people on one vote that they won’t stand with you on the next one. He might not have changed the result on that vote but he would have emerged more gracefully and more graciously than he did. The vote was still very close in the full Committee and on the floor. The outcome in those places might have been different if he had not behaved the way he did.”

From a political standpoint, Flynt explained his decision with respect to foreign aid as a choice between the President and Mahon on one side and Passman on the other – “you’ve got to decide which team you’re going to play on – that’s all.” He noted that President Lyndon Johnson campaigned his district.