

Interview with Rep. Gerald R. Ford, Jr. (R-MI)

June 8, 1959

General remarks: Strong sense for tradition and for idea of work.

He says it's tradition that a man from Michigan has a slot on the Appropriations Committee. Albert Engel (R-MI) was on the Committee, and he went back to run for governor. Ford talked with Minority Leader Joe Martin (R-MA) and with the Michigan man on the Committee on Committees.

Re. a minority report he filed involving two army hospitals: "The Chairman [Cannon] was pretty upset about it. It's just a tradition, I guess, not to have minority reports. I didn't know it was a tradition. When I said I was going to write a report, some eyebrows were raised. The Chairman said it just wasn't the thing to do. Nothing more was said about it. But it wasn't a very popular thing to do, I guess." He only remembers two occasions, once by Agriculture Subcommittee Chairman Jamie Whitten (D-MS) and his.

Re. closely knit Committee: "I think it's more closely knit than any other committee. Yet, it's the biggest committee, and you'd think it would be the reverse. I know on my subcommittee [Defense], you sit together day after day, you get better acquainted, you have mutual sympathy for each other when the other fellows go off to play golf. There's a lot of *esprit de corps* in the Committee."

He puts a great stake in work: Other members of the House see Appropriations Committee in this way. "I think there's some jealousy involved. Some of these committees who don't do very much – they see you working all the time and getting into big problems. And you do work a hell of a lot harder than on most committees."

His reasons for getting on the Committee relate to "prestige and opportunity," and he associates them with work; he was on Public Works Committee, and he wasn't doing too much.

"The Republicans think a lot of John Taber [R-NY]. They like him as a person. If he asks them to do something that he thinks is important, nine times out of ten they'll do it, on that basis. Even people on the other side of the aisle feel that way. They like him and respect his integrity."

Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO) works with Taber, the Committee ranking Minority member, because he needs Taber's votes if he's in trouble. Actually, they are opposites in temperament. Cannon: "shrewd and cunning, always manipulating things" – he holds out rewards, and that's how he gets people to go along; not on a personal basis; "When you look at him, he reminds you of Scrooge in Dickens' play, and I guess he's a lot like that, too." He deals with members on a promise-reward basis. "I've had it told to me many times. He says, 'Maybe there's a chairmanship of a [sub]committee coming up for you.'" Taber deals with men on a personal basis.

Re. Cannon and Taber: Cannon confides in Taber. "He confides in absolutely nobody else."

After the Defense Subcommittee hearings are over, there is a ten-day period, and several conferences were held between Subcommittee Chairman George Mahon (D-TX) and Ford, the Subcommittee's ranking member, and staff. Ford suggests revisions. "I wasn't taken by surprise by the report. In fact, I suggested some revisions."

Some subcommittees get over too much into the legislative area. He says that his subcommittee [Defense] is trying to avoid it so as to keep down resentment. He sees possible trouble coming – H.J. Res. 161 is right – but there is a lot of antagonism. The House is sore because the Appropriations Committee won't implement H.R. 8002, which he calls "window dressing." "I'm afraid there's going to be a knock-down drag-out fight sometime [between the legislative and appropriations committees]. I don't know when."

He explains why Cannon abolished the panel system and had the whole Defense Subcommittee consider all the services: "Inter-service rivalry in the Pentagon was being transferred to the panels over here. The Navy panel wouldn't let the Army or the Air Force get anything they couldn't get. The Chairman got upset."

A member of the subcommittee involved can lead a revolt versus the subcommittee in the full Committee or on the floor, but "It's frowned upon if you offer an amendment in the full Committee if you aren't on the subcommittee. It's considered presumptuous to pose as an expert when you aren't on the subcommittee."

Cannon is a very difficult man to work with; he never tells you what he's doing.

He stresses the floor responsibility of the subcommittee chairman and the minority member. He had the problem immediately, because the military panel system was used.