

Interview with Rep. Robert N. Giaimo (D-CT)

April 1964

Regarding Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO): “I don’t know how he figures. They ignore him, and he ignores them, I think.”

“There’s a question about the future of this Committee. The House is whittling down its power, with the annual authorization and that sort of thing. Last week there was some small matter [National Bureau of Standards], and some of the members got all excited. They opposed it on the floor, and they got up and screamed in the Committee – Bow and Sikes [Rep. Frank Bow (R-OH) and Rep. Robert Sikes (D-FL)]. They know they don’t have a great deal of sympathy on the floor.” But he went on to talk about the vote on the Coast Guard appropriation, where the Committee won on the floor, and he pointed to this as an example of support in the House.

He said that within the last year the young men had become more resigned. “There’s more resignation. They are resigned to waiting around for a while. In a year or two the young people will begin to speak their piece. Even the middle guys, the number two and three men on the subcommittees, don’t speak up much either. If you want to change, it’s hard to know how to go about getting it. You can scream like Charlie Joelson [D-NJ], but what good will it do you? There’s no point in screaming if you can’t be effective.”

His subcommittee (District of Columbia): “I want to keep the one I’ve got. I like it. But I want to pick up another one. So, I guess I’ll talk to the old man [Cannon]. I’d like armed forces. There’s a vacancy coming up. I’ll talk to [Defense Subcommittee Chairman] George Mahon [D-TX] and see if it’s all right with him; and then I’ll go see Cannon. And I’ll talk to some of the other fellows I know on the Committee. It’s hard to know what side to approach Cannon on. Some say that if you ask him you won’t get it. But it seems to work both ways.”

“He sure is cutting up [Independent Offices Subcommittee Chairman] Al Thomas [D-TX].” Cannon never forgave Thomas for the Florida barge canal business a couple of years ago. Thomas put it back in the supplemental. It is possible that this action triggered off the abolition of the Special Deficiencies Subcommittee in 1964.

“Al Thomas is an independent power on the House floor. He can throw his weight around.” Thomas is the only one on the Committee who has that power on the floor. He is a House leader and one of those who much be checked with before taking legislative action. Other Committee members have power in their own bailiwicks.

“The Committee is just a group of subcommittees.” Again, the idea is expressed by him that Chairman Cannon has agreement with the subcommittee chairman, and that’s how he runs the Committee. “If the subcommittee chairman wanted to push him around, they could. So I assume they don’t want to. They must get together with Cannon and agree on things. Just a few people run the Committee.” He used as an example the fact that

Cannon knew [Agriculture Subcommittee Chairman] Jamie Whitten (D-MS) favored the abolition of the Deficiencies Subcommittee, and therefore knew he had his support.

The Committee has an opening meeting which is very brief, in which they adopt the old rules, and that's about all. He can't remember when he received his subcommittee assignments, but he says it was not at the opening meeting.