

NAME: Laird, Melvin R.
POSITION: Representative
STATE: WI
PARTY: R
CHAMBER: HR
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INTERVIEWER: Fenno, Richard F., Jr.
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"Mr Taber runs the Committee with the men from Gerry Ford on down. He works very well with us, consults with us about things -- even about subcommittee assignments for the other members. And that's because he knows we'll work. If you'll work hard, there isn't anything he won't do for you. He's a hard worker himself, and he puts a high value on it. He's afraid the older men won't do the work. That's why he works closely with the younger members. We hate to think of what would happen if Mr. Taber left the Committee. He didn't want to run last year, but we went to him and urged him to run. It's so damned important to have him around. We want him to conserve his energy; but his prestige is so great around here, that we need him badly. He's a great guy, old John Taber, a wonderful man, and the country needs him. He's an old soldier, and he'll stand up for things that may bother him if he thinks it's for the good of the country."

Somewhere during the discussion of Taber, he said, "Now Gerry Ford is ranking minority member on the defense subcommittee. But Carl Andersen and Ben Jensen and those fellows, they wanted to take it over. They made a fight of it last year, but old John kept things in line on that."

Why on? -- He wanted to get on because he was Speaker of the Wisconsin House; he went in there when he was 23 years old and, served seven years on the joint committee on finance -- also chairman of the legislative council, "the interim committee in Wisconsin" -- "I think that experience made a lot of difference. I know Mr. Taber checked with Glenn Davis, who was already on the Committee, and got a good report." He came on in 83-1 when there were 10 vacancies, so he got on in first term.

Interview with Melvin R. Laird
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Re. health, education, and welfare subcommittee -- "We've got a problem on the HEW bill. It's the fastest growing bill already, and would be growing even faster if we didn't slow it down. I believe in steady growth, but some people want one billion a year. Even Bob Taft supported that. I don't believe in going too fast. We've been able to hold it down because in markup I have more support than Fogarty. That's because Cannon and Taber vote in markup and they want to hold the figure down. We're a five-man committee, and we've kept it that way -- even though we take more testimony than any other subcommittee except defense. If we were to enlarge the committee we would be outvoted. Now, we can keep the vote 4-3 and get a lower figure. Taber used to be ranking member of the subcommittee, but that didn't do us any good because we lost his vote, so to speak. He was cancelling out his own vote. So he got off the subcommittee, and now we have his vote, and it's 4-3. Last year, Mr. Taber let me fix the final figure on all items. . . . Our subcommittee met in markup more times than any other committee in the entire House last year."

"Every week I talk with Bob Moyer about how things are going. When he makes out his questions for the hearings, one copy goes to me, and one copy goes to Fogarty. He tells me all he knows and doesn't hide things from me. I learn more from him in one short meeting than I do sitting in for days of the hearings." All work well together.

Re. conference -- "The thing I notice most about conference is that the House is much better prepared than the Senate. We spend more time on it than they do and have more information. The House can control a conference -- now, you have to be careful on the HEW bill not to bring it back to the floor, because you'll get rolled if you do. So you have to go slow there. It weakens you a whole lot in conference. Fogarty usually will go for the Senate figure, and if you make a strong stand, and it comes back to the floor, he will win. In Congress, there is a lot of support for these programs, and there's no telling how high you might go on the floor before enough people would stop. Mostly it's because of the way John Fogarty feels about these matters. He has a deep conviction that we should spend more. We have no trouble like that on defense -- none at all."

He then talked about W&HD and said that Taber didn't like to bring that one back to the floor from conference -- I think this was his point.

Re. House resentment -- "I think there is a feeling that the Appropriations Committee cuts too many sensitive programs. That's one reason why you need to keep the Appropriations Committee large. If you have fifty men and have them well situated, you can always do pretty well on the floor."

Re. the role of the young and the Conte case -- "Conte was having trouble with his subcommittee chairman. He was sounding off in hearings; and it got to be a personal thing. You're not supposed to agree with your subcommittee chairman on everything or polish for him or anything like that. I don't: and if you did, you wouldn't be doing your job. But there are ways to do it. Conte didn't get much support from Mr. Taber, because Mr. Taber was striving for the same things as Conte. Conte was hurting their cause. He tried to slow him down and tone him down a little. After all, your decisions are made in markup and not out there in the hearings. There are ways to do a things."

Re. his contact with departments -- "I talked with the Secretary of Labor the other day, and I'm going to have the Secretary of HEW in here, tomorrow. I called him, and they want to come and talk over their budget requests. I don't make any commitments, but it helps a good deal."

Re. constituents -- "It's not a good committee to be on from the standpoint of your district. There's no public relations value in it. You don't report any bill in your name. They all come out under the committee. There's some prestige value among the editors and working newspapermen in your district. But as for the ordinary constituent, I'd say there aren't any votes in it. I don't have any military installations in my district, so I don't get things for my district. I'd say you ought to have a safe district before you go on Appropriations. My district has retired people only when they die, and I hope it will stay that way. I'd call that a pretty good district."

There are very few changes in subcommittee recommendations -
- he mentioned one he got changed once, but that is an exception.

"We stick together pretty well. There was only one exception -- when we had 14 roll calls in the 85th Congress. . . . Our military construction subcommittee sticks together best of all. We have unanimous agreement on everything. If a fellow enters an objection, and we can't talk him out of it -- and sometimes we can get him to go along -- that's it. We put it in

there."

Re. interest groups -- he gets military contractors -- "They like to come in and visit with us a little. But they don't do it with me any more. I give em hell when they come in here."

He never heard of a clerk's preference meaning anything.

"If one man is a good administrator, and turns back money he didn't use, that makes a good impression. We have two of those cases from last year. If you don't reward him for turning back money and cut him hard the next year instead, he'll never do it again. And we want to encourage that. Sometimes, we'll let a budget request slide right through without touching it just for that reason. We'll keep an eye on him, of course, but we want to give recognition to good administration like that."

Personality makes a difference -- that's all he said.

He didn't really say how he got his subcommittee assignment, except that he started on agriculture and saw HEW as fastest growing area for a young man. Even feels that HEW may get larger than defense one day.

He spends more time on defense than on HEW, because hearings are longer and he attends defense hearings except when HEW is meeting.

Re. committee selection -- for Republicans, two members of substantive committees sit on Committee on Committees -- Appropriations and Ways & Means -- Taber and his counterpart sit with Committee on Committees -- "Mr. Taber has a lot to say about who goes on the Committee." Also, he pointed out, Ways & Means and Appropriations are appointed before other committees -- that was true this year, first man to be appointed is Democrat on Ways & Means since that is their Committee on Committees.

Re. conference -- "Don't forget this. We don't even have to go to conference. If there's one objection, we won't go to conference and there won't be any." House members always have this attitude, but Senate doesn't have to go either! The check in the process is with the House -- it is the Senate that asks for a conference according to protocol -- the House then decides whether or not to accede to one and whether or not to appoint conferees. Sometimes they stall in appointing conferees just to

make their point. Senate must wait!