

Interview with Rep. John Lesinski (D-MI)

April 1964

Independence is his key idea. He voted against the civil rights bill. Talking to Rep. George Meader (R-MI) on the phone: Immigrant background shows through, love of country, hard work.

“I have a sneaking hunch that some of the people who appear before the Committee are trying to indoctrinate me. But I don’t want to make my decision on a personal basis. I want to be objective and decide on the basis of what they need. They want to take me out here and there and show me things to prove me otherwise. And I may take them up on it sometime. But I’m not anxious to do it.” Great suspicion here.

A self-starter: “I had served on Post Office and Civil Service [Committee], and I thought it was about time I got on a better committee.” He filled the Louis Rabaut (D-MI) vacancy on Appropriations. He had seniority in the Michigan delegation, and it was his right to have it, he said. “I was opposed by labor – they didn’t want me on the Committee and some others didn’t. I don’t know why.... I talked to the leadership. [Speaker John] McCormack [D-MA] tried to discourage me because of my seniority on the other committee. Then I began to get some calls. That’s when I decided I want it. I’m a little bastard that way. As soon as I got those phone calls telling me not to take it, I decided to go after it all the way. That’s the kind of person I am.”

Subcommittee activity: “I have a few amendments I want to get through. But most of the time I follow the more experienced members of the subcommittee [Labor, Health, Education and Welfare]. I’m a novice, and I don’t understand the workings of all these agencies. I admit my ignorance and my limitations. These others know a lot more than I do.”

“There used to be partisanship before I came on the subcommittee. There isn’t any more. The vote goes the way I go.... I’m always a swing man on every [sub]committee. I vote the way I think is best for the country. I don’t follow the leadership, and they know I won’t.... I don’t abide by the idea that all Democrats are right and all Republicans are wrong.... I’m always in the soup.” He says Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO) sits in on the markup but doesn’t vote. He says that Cannon’s only prerogative is removing the subcommittee chairman.

He wanted the Treasury, Post Office, and Executive Office Subcommittee because of his service on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee; says he doesn’t know why he was put on Rep. John E. Fogarty’s (D-RI) Labor, Health, Education and Welfare Subcommittee. Cannon did it and didn’t tell him why.

Regarding cancer: “This year is the first year we’ve cut the budget. The account has always been raided before that. You can point to me as the guy who did it. I cut the budget. I don’t agree with the Chairman that you need all these research programs. We have seventeen hundred cancer research programs. That’s waste. I’d support one or two

or even five basic programs. But seventeen hundred of them are too many. What good are they doing?"

Pressure from the leadership: "Once they asked me. I said, I'd see what I can do, that's all. But they know I won't follow the leadership if I don't want to."

"Some people say you can wipe away all our problems by spreading a lot of money around. I don't believe in that. I believe in a balanced budget." He said he was conservative in this way before he came on the Committee. Cannon got Fogarty on this appointment!! He stresses budget cutting all the way through the interview.

He went on the Committee, he said, because "I could do more for my country on this Committee." He spoke often about his country – immigrant background.

He spoke of how getting the report early gave him an advantage in his subcommittee.

The subcommittee does a good job, he thinks. He respects other subcommittees and sticks with the Committee on the floor. "We're so wound up in the work of our subcommittee, we don't have time to find out what the other subcommittees are doing."

"I was the swing man on Post Office and Civil Service [Committee]. I couldn't go along with [Committee Chairman Thomas J.] Murray [D-TN]. And [James H.] Morrison [D-LA], he went too far. Murray didn't go far enough. So I opposed both of them."

He spoke of arguing with the Committee on Elections in the 1962 J. Edward Roush (D-IN)-George O. Chambers (R-IN) case. He likes the contrary, it seems.