



CHAPTER V

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ERA OF  
INVESTIGATIONS

*1921-1940*

January 12, 1922

## Newberry “Condemned”

The 1918 election to fill one of Michigan’s U.S. Senate seats proved to be one of the most bitter and costly contests of that era. Its spending excesses prompted widespread calls for campaign finance reform.

To bolster his party’s slim Senate majority, President Woodrow Wilson convinced automaker Henry Ford to run



*Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections engaged in counting the Ford-Newberry vote.*

in the Michigan Democratic senatorial primary. Trying to improve his chances of victory, the super-rich Ford also entered that state’s Republican primary. Although he lost the Republican contest to industrialist Truman Newberry, Ford captured the Democratic nomination and set out to crush Newberry in the general election. In Newberry, Ford had a tough opponent with similarly unlimited financial resources. Making effective use of campaign advertising, Newberry charged Ford with pacifism, anti-Semitism, and

favoritism in his efforts to help his son Edsel avoid military service in World War I.

Newberry narrowly defeated Ford, but charges that he had intimidated voters and violated campaign-spending laws limiting the amount of personal funds candidates could spend on their races clouded his claim to the seat.

The Senate provisionally seated him in May 1919, pending the outcome of an investigation. As that inquiry got underway, a federal grand jury indicted Newberry on several counts of campaign law violations. Despite the senator’s assertions that he knew nothing of illegal contributions and disbursements, massive evidence, gathered with the help of agents financed by Henry Ford, indicated otherwise. Found guilty on those charges in March 1920, Newberry launched an appeal that resulted in a May 1921 Supreme Court reversal of his conviction.

The Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections investigated the matter and conducted a recount of the general election ballots. The committee determined that the large amounts spent on Newberry’s behalf were not his own funds but were contributed by relatives and friends without his solicitation or knowledge. Consequently, it recommended that the Michigan senator retain his seat.

On January 12, 1922, a narrowly divided Senate affirmed that Newberry had been duly elected, but it nonetheless “severely condemned” his excessive campaign expenditures as “harmful to the honor and dignity of the Senate.” In the face of continuing controversy, Newberry resigned from the Senate later that year. The Newberry case led Congress in 1925 to enact a new Federal Corrupt Practices Act, but this statute proved ineffective in containing congressional campaign financial irregularities in the decades ahead.

### Further Reading

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April 15, 1922

## The Senate Investigates “Teapot Dome”

On April 15, 1922, Wyoming Democratic Senator John Kendrick introduced a resolution that set in motion one of the most significant investigations in Senate history. On the previous day, the *Wall Street Journal* had reported an unprecedented secret arrangement in which the secretary of the interior, without competitive bidding, had leased the U.S. naval petroleum reserve at Wyoming’s Teapot Dome to a private oil company. Wisconsin Republican Senator Robert La Follette arranged for the Senate Committee on Public Lands to investigate the matter. His suspicions deepened after someone ransacked his quarters in the Senate Office Building.

Expecting this to be a tedious and probably futile inquiry, the committee’s Republican leadership allowed the panel’s most junior minority member, Montana Democrat Thomas Walsh, to chair the panel. Preeminent among the many difficult questions facing him was, “How did Interior Secretary Albert Fall get so rich so quickly?”

Edward B. McLean, publisher of the *Washington Post*, and personal friend of President Harding, claimed that he had lent Secretary Fall \$100,000. Senator Walsh traveled to Florida to

question McLean, who pleaded illness as an excuse for not returning to Washington to testify. McLean’s testimony revealed that Fall had returned his checks uncashed. When Fall refused to explain the true source of his sudden wealth, the investigation became front-page news.

Eventually, the investigation uncovered Secretary Fall’s shady dealings. He had received large sums from Harry Sinclair, president of Mammoth Oil Company, which leased Teapot Dome, and from Edward Doheny, whose Pan-American Petroleum Company had been awarded drilling rights in the naval oil reserve at Elk Hills, California. Senator Walsh became a national hero; Fall became the first former cabinet officer to go to prison.

This and a subsequent Senate inquiry triggered several court cases testing the extent of the Senate’s investigative powers. One of those cases resulted in the landmark 1927 Supreme Court decision *McGrain v. Daugherty* that, for the first time, explicitly established Congress’ right to compel witnesses to testify before its committees.



*Edward B. McLean before the Senate committee investigating naval oil leases on March 12, 1924.*

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November 21, 1922

## First Woman Senator

The governor faced a serious political dilemma. He wanted to run for the U.S. Senate, but his earlier opposition to ratification of the Constitution's equal suffrage amendment seriously alienated many of his state's women voters. How could he gain their allegiance?



*Rebecca L. Felton, seated, first woman appointed to the U.S. Senate, being greeted by prominent political women in Washington, D.C.*

On October 3, 1922, Georgia's Democratic Governor Thomas Hardwick made history by appointing the first woman to a Senate vacancy. He believed this act would appeal to the newly enfranchised women of Georgia. Taking no chances of creating a potential rival for the seat in the upcoming general election, he chose 87-year-old Rebecca Felton. His appointee had led a long and active political life. A well-known suffragist and temper-

ance advocate, she was also an outspoken white supremacist and advocate of racial segregation.

At the time, the Senate was out of session and not expected to convene until after the election, when the appointed senator would have to step aside for her elected replacement. Felton's supporters deluged President Warren Harding with requests that

he call a special session of Congress before the November election so that she could be legitimately seated. Harding ignored these pleas. Thus there was little chance that Felton would actually become a senator by taking the required oath in open session.

On election day, despite his political calculations, Hardwick lost to Democrat Walter George. When the Senate convened on November 21, 1922, George astutely stepped aside so that Felton could claim the honor of being the first female senator—if only for a day.

In her address the following day to a capacity audience, the Georgia senator described a cartoon she had received showing the Senate in session. "The seats seemed to be fully occupied, and there appeared in the picture the figure of a woman who had evidently entered without sending in her card. The gentlemen in the Senate took the situation variously," she continued. "Some seemed to be a little bit hysterical, but most of them occupied their time looking at the ceiling," without offering the newcomer a seat. Felton concluded with the following prediction. "When the women of the country come in and sit with you, though there may be but very few in the next few years, I pledge you that you will get ability, you will get integrity of purpose, you will get exalted patriotism, and you will get unstinted usefulness."

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January 9, 1924

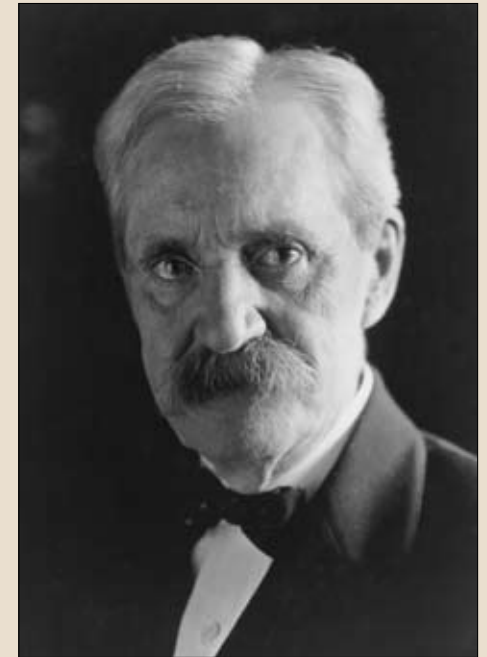
## Senate Majority Elects Minority Chairman

On January 9, 1924, “one of the most stubborn fights over a chairmanship in the history of the Senate” reached a bitter and exhausting conclusion. For the first time, a minority-party senator won election as chairman of a major committee over the majority party’s determined opposition. At stake was leadership of the powerful Senate Interstate Commerce Committee.

This event occurred at a time of great political volatility. Several months earlier, President Warren Harding’s unexpected death had abruptly placed Calvin Coolidge in the White House. Senate Republican Majority Leader Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, in the Senate since 1893, and that body’s most senior member, hated Coolidge, his bitter home-state party rival. The 1922 mid-term elections had reduced his party’s majority by eight seats, leaving 51 Republicans—whose ranks included seven independent-minded members—and 45 Democrats. Aging and irritable, Lodge showed little interest by 1924 in working for unity in a party already deeply divided between conservative and progressive factions. With that year’s presidential election campaign just ahead, prospects for enacting a substantive legislative program seemed remote.

When the 68th Congress convened in December 1923, Iowa’s conservative Republican senator, Albert Cummins, expected to continue serving as Interstate Commerce Committee chairman and Senate president pro tempore—posts that he had held since the Republicans took control of the Senate in 1919. As president pro tempore at a time when there was no vice president, Cummins stood to gain both prestige and the vice president’s higher salary. Deeply opposed to Cummins, Progressive Republicans hoped to gain the Interstate Commerce Committee’s chairmanship for that panel’s second most senior member, Wisconsin progressive Robert La Follette. To accomplish this, they threatened to shift their vital seven votes to another candidate for president pro tempore unless Cummins stepped aside as committee chair. Conservative and mainstream Republicans, however, feared La Follette’s influence as committee chair and encouraged Cummins to drop his bid for the president pro tempore’s post in order to preserve his chairmanship. For his part, Cummins decided to fight for both positions.

The resulting struggle kept the Senate in turmoil for more than a month into the new session. Neither Cummins nor the committee’s ranking Democrat, South Carolina’s Ellison Smith, could muster the necessary majority. On January 9, 1924, after 32 ballots, the Progressive Republicans, in their desperation to block Cummins, reluctantly provided the votes necessary to elect Democrat Smith.



*Albert Baird Cummins, senator from Iowa (1908-1926).*

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“Senate’s 32d Vote Elects E. D. Smith,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1924, 2.

May 2, 1924

## Radio Days

“It will profoundly change the Senate.” “It will benefit media-savvy members and force the retirement of those who are uncomfortable with the new technology.” These concerns were commonly heard during the early 1980s debate over whether to permit the televising of Senate floor proceedings, but they originated 60 years earlier in response

another media innovation—radio.

World War I produced significant advances in the field of radio technology. In the aftermath of that conflict, commercial radio stations began operation throughout the nation and radio pioneers explored the public service and entertainment potential of this new medium.

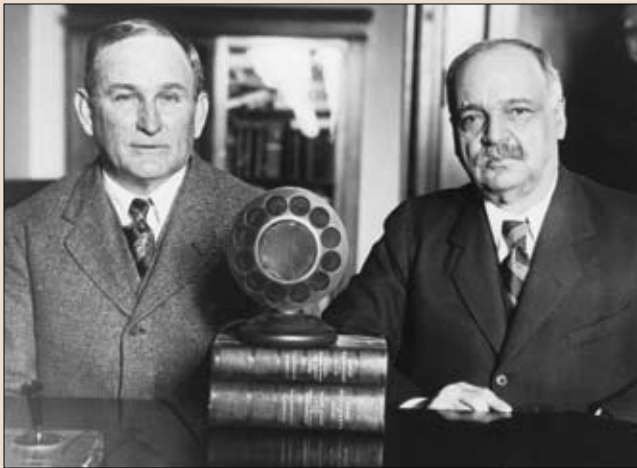
In the Senate, it took a new member with a background in radio to grasp possibilities for applying this emerging technology to the chamber operations. Soon after Nebraska Republican Robert Howell took

his seat in 1923, he proposed establishment of a joint army-navy commission to examine the use of radio in the Senate. Howell had served as a naval submarine officer during World War I and later conducted a survey of radio uses in Europe.

The first part of Howell’s proposal addressed the problem of chronically poor acoustics in the Senate Chamber by requesting technical advice on placement of an “apparatus” there to allow each senator at his desk to “individually and clearly hear, without the use of a head receiver, the proceedings of the Senate at all times in whatever tone of voice conducted.” The proposal’s second portion sought information on broadcasting Senate proceedings to the nation through the radio facilities of the war and navy departments.

Freshman Howell immediately ran into opposition from Republican Majority Leader Henry Cabot Lodge, a 30-year veteran. Citing the cost and disruption of equipment installation, Lodge concluded, “I do not at all know whether or not the Senate desires to have everything which is said here broadcasted.” Other senators treated Howell’s proposal as a joke, with one promising support only if the Senate voted to install a radio transmitter in the White House “so we can hear what is going on down there.” Another warned about extended sessions. “We stay here twice too long as it is. If we put in a radio, we’d never adjourn.”

Although the Senate eventually agreed to Howell’s resolution on May 2, 1924, it took no follow-up action. Decades passed before the installation in 1971 of an effective voice amplification system in the chamber and the inauguration in 1986 of regular radio and television coverage of floor proceedings.



*Senators Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas (1913-1937), left, and Charles Curtis of Kansas (1907-1913, 1915-1929), rehearse for a 1928 talk on Congress to be delivered over radio.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*, 68th Congress, 1st sess., pp. 5122-24, 7666.

January 28, 1925

## The Senate Judiciary Committee Grills a Nominee

On January 5, 1925, President Calvin Coolidge nominated Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone to a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. Commentators around the nation readily agreed that Stone's character, learning, and temperament perfectly suited him to the job.

Within days, however, a complication arose that threatened Stone's chances for an easy Senate confirmation. The source of the trouble was Senator Burton K. Wheeler, a progressive Democrat—and former U.S. attorney—from Montana. The previous year, Wheeler had launched an investigation to determine why Stone's predecessor, Attorney General Harry Daugherty, had failed to prosecute government officials implicated in the Teapot Dome oil-leasing scandal. As a result of Wheeler's probe, Daugherty resigned in March 1924. A month later, with Stone settling in as attorney general, a federal grand jury in Montana indicted Senator Wheeler on charges related to the conduct of his private law practice. Seeing the indictment as an effort to discredit his continuing investigation of the Justice Department, Wheeler asked the Senate to examine the charges against him. Following a two-month inquiry, and without waiting for the Montana court to dispose of the case, the Senate overwhelmingly exonerated Wheeler.

The Wheeler case tormented Attorney General Stone for months. Influential friends of Wheeler urged Stone to drop both the Montana case and new information that led Wheeler's oppo-

nents to seek a second indictment. Stone explained that he felt honor bound to pursue the second indictment, even though it involved a sitting senator whom the Senate had recently investigated and cleared. The Senate, he said, "is just not the place to determine the guilt or innocence of a man charged with crime."

On January 24, 1925, five days after the Senate Judiciary Committee had recommended Stone's confirmation, Senator Thomas Walsh—Wheeler's Montana colleague and legal counsel—convinced the Senate to return the nomination to committee for further review. Although President Coolidge refused to withdraw the nomination, he agreed to an unprecedented compromise. He would allow Stone to become the first Supreme Court nominee in history to appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee. On January 28, 1925, Stone's masterful performance during five hours of public session testimony cleared the way for his quick confirmation.

Senator Wheeler soon won acquittal of all charges. Not until 1955, however, did the Senate Judiciary Committee routinely adopt the practice, based on the precedent established by the Stone nomination, of requiring all Supreme Court nominees to appear in person.



From left to right, *Senator Albert B. Cummins of Iowa, Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone, and Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana, on the day of Stone's public testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee.*

### Further Reading

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June 1, 1926

## The American Senate Published

Until the 1930s, newly elected vice presidents traditionally went to the Senate Chamber on inauguration day to deliver a brief speech. They generally took this occasion to ask the senators over whom they would preside for the next four years to forgive them for not knowing much about parliamentary procedure and to bear with them while they tried to learn. This polite tradition sustained a major jolt in 1925. On that occasion, Vice President Charles Dawes, a conservative Republican, unleashed a blistering attack on a small group of progressive Republican senators who had filibustered legislation at the end of the previous session.

Eight years earlier, the Senate had adopted its first cloture rule, which allowed two-thirds of the senators present and voting to take steps to end debate on a particular measure. Dawes thought the Senate should revise that rule, making it easier to apply by allowing a simple majority to close debate.

The existing two-thirds rule, he thundered, “at times enables Senators to consume in oratory those last precious minutes of a session needed for momentous decisions,” thereby placing great

power in the hands of a few senators. Unless Rule 22 was liberalized, it would “lessen the effectiveness, prestige, and dignity of the United States Senate.” Dawes’ unexpected diatribe infuriated senators of all philosophical leanings, who believed that the chamber’s rules were none of the vice president’s business.

On June 1, 1926, Columbia University professor Lindsay Rogers published a book entitled *The American Senate*. His purpose was to defend the Senate tradition of virtually unlimited debate, except in times of dire national emergency. Professor Rogers fundamentally disagreed with Vice President Dawes. In his memorably stated view, the “undemocratic, usurping Senate is the indispensable check and balance in the American system, and only complete freedom of debate allows it to play this role.” “Adopt [majority] cloture in the Senate,” he argued, “and the character of the American Government will be profoundly changed.”

Written in a breezy journalistic style, Rogers’ *The American Senate* encompassed issues beyond debate limitation. For example, he believed members spent too much time on trivial issues and that professional investigators—not members—should handle congressional inquiries. Although now long forgotten, his work set the agenda for other outside scholarly observers and became one of the most influential books about the Senate to appear during the first half of the 20th century.



*Vice President Charles Dawes wanted the Senate to change its cloture rule, as depicted in this cartoon, which shows Dawes as a circus ringmaster trying to get an elephant labeled “Senate Majority” to jump through a hoop labeled “Rules Revision.”*

### Further Reading

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May 11, 1928

## Senators Vote to Knock Out Walls

It was predictable. Elect a former public health commissioner to the United States Senate and wait for the recommendations about an unhealthy working environment. Royal Copeland entered the Senate in 1923 after a five-year term as commissioner of the New York City board of health. A practicing physician and a medical educator, the New York senator wasted little time in reaching a conclusion about the quality of the air in the Senate Chamber. He cited the deaths of 34 incumbent senators over the past 12 years and suggested that their lives had probably been shortened by having to work in that chamber. In the winter, the dry heated air was blamed for the spread of influenza, bronchitis, and the common cold; in the summer, excessive heat and humidity sapped members' energy and tested their tempers.

In June 1924, as the increasingly warm late spring days again called attention to this perennial problem, the Senate adopted Senator Copeland's resolution directing Capitol officials to consult with leading architects to develop a plan that would improve the "living conditions of the Senate Chamber."

The firm of Carrere & Hastings, which had designed the Russell Senate Office Building a generation earlier, quickly produced the requested plan. The architects proposed converting the chamber's configuration to that of a semi-circular amphitheater, lowering the ceiling for improved hearing, and removing several walls to extend the room to the Capitol's northern wall.

In removing these interior walls, the Senate would have to sacrifice the Marble Room, the President's Room, and the vice president's formal office. To brighten the chamber's dreary interior, Carrere & Hastings proposed the addition of three two-story-high windows in the outer wall, along with a ventilating apparatus to draw fresh air into the quarters.

On May 11, 1928, the Senate approved funding of \$500,000 to accomplish the project. Five days later, however, Senator Copeland abruptly requested that his proposal be "indefinitely postponed" because it was "no longer necessary." The reason for this sudden reversal lay in a separate appropriation of \$323,000 to produce a ventilation system that had been endorsed by a team of public health experts. Tests demonstrated that the chamber could be made comfortable and healthy—without the cost and disruption of knocking down walls—through an innovation, designed by the Carrier Corporation, known as "manufactured weather." Work began early the following year and, by August 1929, the Senate had in place its first air conditioning system.



*Senator Royal S. Copeland of New York (1923-1938), left, advocate for better air quality in the Senate, inspecting one of the ventilating fans that supply air to the Senate Chamber.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, by William C. Allen. 106th Congress, 2d sess., 2001. S. Doc. 106-29.

November 4, 1929

## Senator Censured in Lobbyist Case

When former Senator Hiram Bingham died in 1956, one obituary writer observed that the Connecticut Republican “had crammed [many] careers into his lifetime, any one of which might have sufficed for most men.”



Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut (1924-1933), left, lands in an autogiro on the Capitol Plaza in 1931.

Over the course of his 80 years, Bingham had been a scholar, explorer, aviator, businessman, and politician. Born in 1875, he earned degrees from Yale, Berkeley, and Harvard. With a doctorate in South American history, he traveled that continent extensively. In 1911, he became the first explorer to uncover the fabulous Incan ruins of Machu Picchu. Bingham taught at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton and wrote more than a dozen books related to South American geography and history. In the early 1920s, he entered Connecticut politics and won races for lieutenant governor, governor, and U.S. senator.

This genial and accomplished man appeared destined for a distinguished Senate career. Then he made a poor decision. As a member of the Senate Finance Committee in September 1929, Bingham asked the Connecticut Association of Manufacturers to detail one of its lobbyists to his office during the committee’s consideration of tariff legislation. When the Finance Committee closed its deliberations to the public, Bingham placed the lobbyist on the Senate payroll so he could attend

those sessions as a Senate staffer. He neglected, however, to tell other committee members that the lobbyist also remained on the association’s payroll. As he had salary funds for only one staff position, Bingham executed a plan that was irregular even by the murky standards of his day. His own clerk, although still performing his duties, went off the Senate payroll for the duration of the hearings. The lobbyist then passed his Senate salary on to the clerk.

When an ongoing Senate Judiciary subcommittee investigation discovered this arrangement, Bingham defended it by saying that the association’s representative was not the kind of lobbyist who visited members “trying to get them to do something they did not want to do.” The subcommittee condemned this relationship, but recommended no formal Senate action. The matter would have died there but for Bingham’s decision to attack the subcommittee’s inquiry as a partisan witch hunt. This awakened the Senate’s interest and resulted in a resolution of censure. On November 4, 1929, the Senate voted 54 to 22 to censure Bingham. After leaving the Senate following the 1932 Democratic electoral landslide, he explored new careers, including that of lobbyist.

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November 24, 1929

## Senator Francis Warren, Last Union Vet, Dies

Just before Thanksgiving Day in 1929, the Senate mourned the loss of one of its best-known members. When he died on November 24, 1929, Wyoming's Francis E. Warren had served in the Senate longer than any person in history—37 years. Warren held two other distinctions. He was the last senator to have served on the Union side in the Civil War and among the first to have hired a woman staff member.

Born in Massachusetts in 1844, Warren enlisted in a home-state regiment at the start of the Civil War. During the siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, in 1863, a Confederate bombardment killed most of his squad's members, but left Warren with a scalp wound and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

After the war, he moved to Wyoming, where he invested successfully in livestock and real estate. Warren's career in Republican politics blossomed along with his financial success. When Wyoming entered the Union in 1890, he became its first governor and, weeks later, one of its first two U.S. senators.

The freshman senator landed choice legislative assignments, including chairmanship of the Committee on Irrigation and Reclamation. From that panel, the shrewd, hard-working, behind-the-scenes operator shaped land-use policies vital to the arid West.

In 1905, the year Warren became chairman of the Senate's Military Affairs Committee, his daughter married an aspiring young army captain named John Pershing. The following year, President Theodore Roosevelt promoted the chairman's son-in-law from captain to general, jumping him ahead of nearly 900 more senior officers. Tragically, in 1915, Warren's daughter and three of his four grandchildren died in a fire at a military base.

The widowed General Pershing went on to become commander of American forces in World War I. As chair or ranking minority member of the Appropriations Committee from 1911 to 1929, Warren had a major role in funding the war effort.

Earlier, in 1900, Warren set a controversial precedent when he hired Leona Wells as one of the first female Senate clerical staff members.

The idea that a woman secretary would sit behind a committee's closed doors, listening in on confidential proceedings, scandalized his colleagues. Over the next nearly three decades, Wells demonstrated the groundlessness of those concerns, displaying a competence equal to that of the best male secretaries. By the time of Warren's death, more than 200 women had joined Wells on the Senate payroll, assuming responsibilities that few would have imagined possible in 1900.



*General John J. Pershing escorting the widow and son of the late Senator Francis E. Warren of Wyoming following his funeral rites at the Capitol.*

### Further Reading

"Warren of Wyoming, Dean of Senate, Dies," *New York Times*, November 25, 1929, 1.

May 7, 1930

## Supreme Court Nominee Rejected



*The Senate rejected the nomination of Judge John Parker of North Carolina to the Supreme Court by a vote of 39 to 41.*

On the seventh of May 1930, the Senate rejected a Supreme Court nominee. What makes this action worth noting today is that it was the Senate's only rejection of a Supreme Court candidate in the 74-year span between 1894 and 1968. Throughout most of the 19th century, the Senate had shown no such reticence, rejecting or otherwise blocking nearly one out of every three high court nominees.

Early in 1930, death claimed two Supreme Court justices. Republican President Herbert Hoover chose former associate justice Charles Evans Hughes to fill the vacant position of chief justice. As the deepening economic depression eroded the president's clout on Capitol Hill, a coalition of southern senators and progressives from other regions sought to block Hughes' confirmation. Some opposed the nominee for his close ties to large corporations, while others believed that his resignation from the court years earlier to run as the 1916 Republican presidential nominee disqualified him from a second chance. After only several days of debate, the Senate confirmed his appointment, but with many members deeply resentful of the manner in which the administration had handled the nomination.

Three weeks after the Hughes confirmation, a second justice died. Hoover believed he had an easily confirmable candidate when he nominated John Parker, a prominent North Carolina Republican and chief judge of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Unfortunately for Judge Parker, two actions from his past doomed his chances. Several years earlier, he had delivered a strongly anti-labor opinion that infuriated the American Federation of Labor. The NAACP also joined the opposition in response to remarks Parker had made a decade before. In the midst of a 1920 campaign for governor of North Carolina, Parker had responded to a race-baiting prediction by his opponents that, if elected, he would encourage political participation by black citizens. "The participation of the Negro in politics," said Parker, "is a source of evil and danger to both races and is not desired by the wise men in either race or by the Republican Party of North Carolina." That comment, his anti-labor opinion, and senatorial resentment against the Hoover administration, led to his rejection by a vote of 39 to 41.

Hoover's next nominee, Owen Roberts, cleared the Senate without controversy. Over the following 38 years, until 1968, the Senate approved all high court nominees, conducting roll call votes on only 7 of 24 candidates.

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Abraham, Henry J. *Justices, Presidents and Senators: A History of U.S. Supreme Court Appointments From Washington to Clinton*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.



June 25, 1930

## The Senate Considers Banning Dial Phones

The Senate acquired its first operator-assisted telephone in 1881. Over the next half century, telephone operators gradually supplemented telegraph operators in helping senators send their messages. In the spring of 1930, reflecting further advances in communications technology, the following resolution came before the Senate:

Whereas dial telephones are more difficult to operate than are manual telephones; and Whereas Senators are required, since the installation of dial phones in the Capitol, to perform the duties of telephone operators in order to enjoy the benefits of telephone service; and Whereas dial telephones have failed to expedite telephone service; Therefore be it resolved that the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate is authorized and directed to order the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. to replace with manual phones within 30 days after the adoption of this resolution, all dial telephones in the Senate wing of the United States Capitol and in the Senate office building.

Sponsored by Virginia's Carter Glass, the resolution passed without objection when first considered on May 22, 1930. Arizona's Henry Ashurst praised its sponsor for his restrained language. *The Congressional Record* would not be mailable, he said, "if it contained in print what Senators think of the dial telephone system." When Washington Senator Clarence Dill asked

why the resolution did not also ban the dial system from the District of Columbia, Glass said he hoped the phone company would take the hint.

One day before the scheduled removal of all dial phones, Maryland Senator Millard Tydings offered a resolution to give senators a choice. It appeared that some of the younger senators actually preferred the dial phones. This angered the anti-dial senators, who immediately blocked the measure's consideration.

Finally, technology offered a solution. Although the telephone company had pressed for the installation of an all-dial system, it acknowledged that it could provide the Senate with phones that worked both ways. But Senator Dill was not ready to give up. In his experience, the dial phone "could not be more awkward than it is. One has to use both hands to dial; he must be in a position where there is good light, day or night, in order to see the number; and if he happens to turn the dial not quite far enough, then he gets a wrong connection."

Senator Glass, the original sponsor, had the last word before the Senate agreed to the compromise plan. "Mr. President, so long as I am not pestered with the dial and may have the manual telephone, while those who want to be pestered with [the dial] may have it, all right."



*Vice President Charles Curtis' secretarial staff. The woman on the left uses a manual phone.*

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U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*, 71st Congress, 1st sess., pp. 9341, 11269, 11648-49.

April 26, 1932

## Cotton Tom's Last Blast

On only the most extraordinary occasions has the Senate permitted a former member to come before the body to address senators. One of those occasions took place on April 26, 1932. Over the fierce objection of the majority leader, the Senate, by a one-vote margin, extended this unusual privilege to former Alabama Senator James Thomas Heflin.

Known as “Cotton Tom” because of his devotion to Alabama’s leading agricultural commodity, the flamboyant Heflin built a political career as an unremitting opponent of equal rights for black Americans, women, and Roman Catholics.

In 1908, while a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he had shot and seriously wounded a black man who confronted him on a Washington streetcar. Although indicted, Heflin succeeded in having the charges dismissed. In subsequent home-state campaigns, he cited that shooting as one of his major career accomplishments.

While firmly against giving the vote to women, Heflin believed they would be grateful for his role in establishing Mother’s Day as a national holiday.

Elected to the Senate in 1920, Cotton Tom opposed federal child labor legislation, in part, because it might create a serious shortage of agricultural field hands. His anti-Catholicism and his support for Prohibition led him to oppose his party’s 1928 presidential candidate, New York Governor Al Smith.

Heflin’s endorsement of Republican Herbert Hoover outraged Alabama’s Democratic leaders, who denied him their party’s nomination in 1930 to another Senate term. Unstoppable, he ran as an independent, but lost decisively to John Bankhead. When he returned to Washington for a post-election session, he demanded a Senate investigation of voting fraud in hopes of overturning Bankhead’s election. The inquiry lasted 15 months and cost \$100,000.

In April 1932, with Heflin’s term expired and Bankhead seated, the Senate prepared to vote on a committee recommendation against Heflin. At that point, the former senator got his chance to put his case to the full Senate. Originally given two hours, he took five. His face crimson, Heflin punctuated his remarks with vehement gestures and offensive racist jokes. As he thundered to a conclusion, the gallery audience, packed with his supporters, jumped to its feet with a roar of approval and was immediately ordered out of the chamber. Two days later, the Senate overwhelmingly dismissed Heflin’s claim. Cotton Tom had delivered his last blast.



*This cartoon depicting Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama (1920-1931), as a shabby vaudeville actor with a sword and spear labeled “Religious Bigotry” was published in April 1928 after Heflin tried to organize a rally in North Carolina against Al Smith, the Catholic governor of New York, who was campaigning for the Democratic nomination for president.*

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June 17, 1932

## Capitol Besieged

For as long as representative assemblies have existed, in nations throughout the world, images of rebellious troops marching on legislative chambers to enforce their demands have disturbed the sleep of lawmakers. The framers of the U.S. Constitution had those images in mind in 1787 as they convened at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Just four years earlier, mutinous Revolutionary War soldiers had surrounded that same building during a meeting of the Continental Congress. Seeking immediate congressional action to provide back pay and pensions, the angry militiamen stuck their muskets through open windows and pointed them at the likes of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Congress responded to this threat by fleeing Philadelphia and moving the capital to Princeton, New Jersey. Memories of this incident caused the framers to include a provision in the Constitution guaranteeing federal control over the national seat of government.

A century and a half later, on June 17, 1932, another army massed outside the halls of Congress. While the soldiers of that army carried no muskets, they came to pressure Congress to award them a bonus the government had promised in legislation passed eight years earlier for their service in World War I. Under that 1924 law, however, the bonus was not to be paid until

1945. Adjusted to the military record of individual veterans, the award was expected to average \$1,000. Desperate and penniless in the depths of the Great Depression, this self-styled Bonus Expeditionary Force of 25,000 veterans came to the nation's capital to lobby for an immediate payment. Two days earlier, the House of Representatives, over its own leadership's objections, bowed to the protesters' demands and passed the necessary legislation.

Now, as the Senate prepared to vote, thousands of veterans rallied outside its chamber on the east front plaza. Capitol police, armed with rifles, took up positions at the building's doors. Despite Democratic Leader Joe Robinson's support for the legislation, most members favored a remedy that would benefit not only the veterans but all economically distressed Americans. The Senate overwhelmingly rejected the bonus bill. Hearing the news, the marchers dispersed peacefully, but remained in Washington at makeshift campsites near Capitol Hill.

A month later, heavily armed federal troops, led by General Douglas MacArthur and Majors Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton, torched and gassed the veterans' camps, killing several and wounding many. Anarchy, both military and civilian, seemed a real possibility in those very dark times.



*Bonus army on the Capitol lawn, Washington, D.C., July 13, 1932.*

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February 7, 1933

## The Senate Sacks its Sergeant at Arms

It was every Senate staffer's worst nightmare: to be called to the Senate Chamber to explain a personal action considered disrespectful of the institution. On a cold winter's afternoon in 1933, that is what happened to Sergeant at Arms

David Barry. The Senate's chief law enforcement officer, responsible for carrying out orders to arrest others sought by the Senate, was himself commanded to appear before the body. The widely respected official had held his office for nearly 14 years, making him—even today—the third longest-serving sergeant at arms in Senate history. In February 1933, however, Barry faced immediate dismissal and possible trial in federal court on charges of libel.

The 73-year-old Republican had spent most of his life associated with the Senate, previously serving as a page, a secretary to several members, and a newspaper correspondent. Barry's term would have ended four weeks later with the start of the 73rd Congress, when control passed to the Democrats. But members believed that his transgression was so outrageous that it deserved an immediate response.



David S. Barry, Senate sergeant at arms (1919-1933).

Late in 1932, Barry drafted an article to be published soon after his retirement. Unfortunately for him, the journal printed it while Barry was still in office. In the article, he criticized reformers who called for major changes in Senate operations. He explained, “there are not many crooks in Congress, that is, out and out grafters; there are not many Senators or Representatives who sell their vote for money, and it is pretty well known who those few are; but there are many demagogues of the kind that will vote for legislation solely because they think that it will help their political and social fortunes.”

On February 3, hours after accounts of the article appeared in the morning papers, the Senate summoned Barry to its chamber. The deeply upset sergeant at arms told the assembled senators that he had written the article, “carelessly and thoughtlessly.” “My idea was to defend the Senate from the [mistaken] popular belief that there are crooks and grafters here. . . . I do not know of any such men and did not mean to imply that I did.” On February 7, 1933, after waiting several days to avoid giving the impression of a hasty judgment, the Senate fired Barry. Thus ended an otherwise distinguished Senate career.

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September 4, 1934

## “Merchants of Death”

On a hot Tuesday morning following Labor Day in 1934, several hundred people crowded into the Caucus Room of the Senate Office Building to witness the opening of an investigation that journalists were already calling “historic.” Although World War I had been over for 16 years, the inquiry promised to reopen an intense debate about whether the nation should ever have gotten involved in that costly conflict.

The so-called “Senate Munitions Committee” came into being because of widespread reports that manufacturers of armaments had unduly influenced the American decision to enter the war in 1917. These weapons’ suppliers had reaped enormous profits at the cost of more than 53,000 American battle deaths. As local conflicts reignited in Europe through the early 1930s, suggesting the possibility of a second world war, concern spread that these “merchants of death” would again drag the United States into a struggle that was none of its business. The time had come for a full congressional inquiry.

To lead the seven-member special committee, the Senate’s Democratic majority chose a Republican—42-year-old North Dakota Senator Gerald P. Nye. Typical of western agrarian progressives, Nye energetically opposed U.S. involvement in foreign wars. He promised, “when the Senate investigation is over, we shall see that war and preparation for war is not a matter of national honor and national defense, but a matter of profit for the few.”

Over the next 18 months, the “Nye Committee” held 93 hearings, questioning more than 200 witnesses, including J. P. Morgan, Jr., and Pierre du Pont. Committee members found little hard evidence of an active conspiracy among arms makers, yet the panel’s reports did little to weaken the popular prejudice against “greedy munitions interests.”

The investigation came to an abrupt end early in 1936. The Senate cut off committee funding after Chairman Nye blundered into an attack on the late Democratic President Woodrow Wilson. Nye suggested that Wilson had withheld essential information from Congress as it considered a declaration of war. Democratic leaders, including Appropriations Committee Chairman Carter Glass of Virginia, unleashed a furious response against Nye for “dirty-daubing the sepulcher of Woodrow Wilson.” Standing before cheering colleagues in a packed Senate Chamber, Glass slammed his fist onto his desk until blood dripped from his knuckles.

Although the Nye Committee failed to achieve its goal of nationalizing the arms industry, it inspired three congressional neutrality acts in the mid-1930s that signaled profound American opposition to overseas involvement.



The “Dough” Boy (pencil drawing by Harold M. Talburt) depicts international arms traffickers who were believed by some to have been instrumental in drawing the nation into World War I.

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June 12-13, 1935

## Huey Long Filibusters

**D**escribed as “the most colorful, as well as the most dangerous, man to engage in American politics,” Louisiana’s Huey Pierce Long served in the Senate from 1932 until his assassination less than four years later. Today, visitors to his six-foot, eight-inch bronze likeness in the U.S. Capitol’s Statuary Hall see this master of the Senate filibuster captured in mid-sentence.

Long gave the Senate’s official reporters of debates a Bible because his wife wanted the reporters to “take those supposed quotations you are making from the Bible and fit them into your speeches exactly as they are in the Scripture.” She might also have suggested donating a copy of the U.S. Constitution, for he loved to quote his version of that document as well.

On June 12, 1935, the fiery Louisiana senator began what would become his longest and most dramatic filibuster. His goal was to force the Senate’s Democratic leadership to retain a provision, opposed by President Franklin Roosevelt, requiring Senate confirmation for the National Recovery Administration’s senior employees. His motive was to prevent his political enemies in Louisiana from obtaining lucrative N.R.A. jobs.

Huey Long spoke for 15 hours and 30 minutes—the second-longest Senate filibuster to that time. As day turned to night, he read and analyzed each section of the Constitution—a document he claimed the president’s New Deal programs had transformed to “ancient and forgotten lore.”

Looking around the chamber at several of his colleagues dozing at their desks, the Louisiana populist suggested to Vice President John Nance Garner, who was presiding, that every senator should be forced to listen to him until excused. Garner replied, “That would be unusual cruelty under the Bill of Rights.” Finished with the Constitution, Long asked for suggestions. “I will accommodate any senator on any point on which he needs advice,” he threatened. Although no senator took up his offer, reporters in the press gallery did by sending notes to the floor. When these ran out, he provided his recipes for fried oysters and potlikker. At four in the morning, he yielded to a call of nature and soon saw his proposal defeated. Two days later, however, he was back, refreshed and ready to fight for a liberalization of a controversial new plan—the Social Security Act.



*Huey P. Long, senator from Louisiana (1932-1935).*

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July 1, 1935

## First Official Parliamentarian Named

In January 1955, the Senate briefly suspended its proceedings to honor seven staff members. Never before had there been such an occasion. The seven employees shared one characteristic: Each had worked for the Senate for more than half a century.

The best known among this honored group was Charles Watkins. Twenty years earlier, in July 1935, Watkins had been appointed the Senate's first official parliamentarian.

Charles Watkins had arrived in the Senate in 1904 from Arkansas to work as a stenographer. Blessed with a photographic memory, and a curiosity about Senate procedures, he eventually transferred to the Senate floor as journal clerk. In 1919, he started what became a 45-year search of the *Congressional Record*, back to the 1880s, for Senate decisions that interpreted the body's individual standing rules to the legislative needs of the moment.

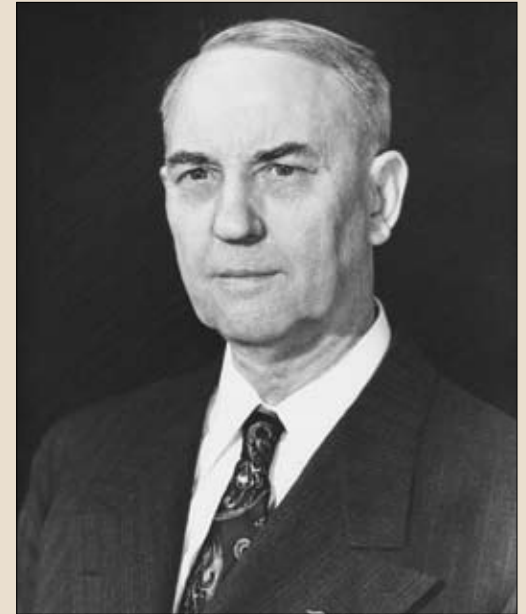
In 1923, Watkins replaced the ailing assistant secretary of the Senate as unofficial advisor on floor procedure to the presiding officer. From that time, he became the body's parliamentarian, in fact if not in title. Finally, in 1935, at a time when an increased volume of New Deal-era legislation expanded opportunities for procedural confusion and legislative mischief, he gained the actual title.

By 1949, when Watkins reached the age of 70, the Senate authorized hiring of an assistant parliamentarian to give him some relief during the all-night filibusters of that era. On one occasion in the 1950s, he worked a round-the-clock filibuster for 48 unrelieved hours.

In 1964, still on the job after 60 years, Watkins' legendary memory began to fail, causing problems with the advice he gave to presiding officers. At the end of that year's grueling session, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield reluctantly informed the 85-year-old "Charlie" Watkins that his tenure as parliamentarian had come to an end.

At that 1955 tribute to long-serving staff, South Dakota Senator Francis Case praised Watkins' command of parliamentary procedure. "Once his mind clasps a point, it sets like a vise. He is as a seeing-eye dog to guide the newcomers through parliamentary mazes and a rod and a staff to those who preside. It might be said that he sits only a little lower than the angels and dispenses wisdom like an oracle."

Today, the book known as *Riddick's Senate Procedure*, based on the research Watkins began in 1919, and continued by his successor Floyd Riddick, serves as a perfect memorial to this dignified and kindly man of the Senate.



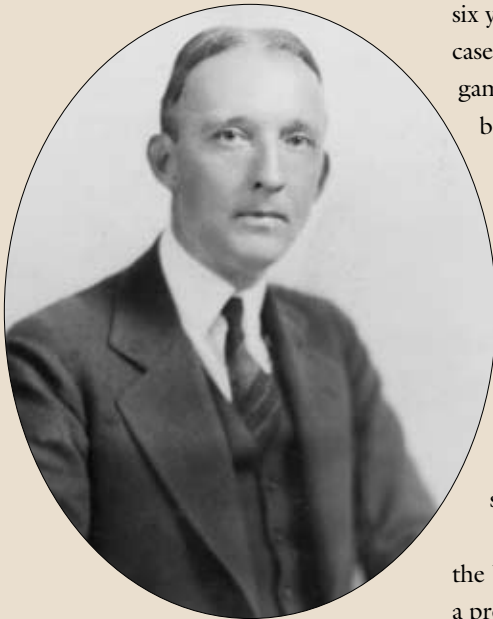
*Charles L. Watkins, Senate parliamentarian (1935-1964).*

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July 11, 1935

## Hugo Black Lobby Investigation



*Hugo L. Black, senator from Alabama (1927-1937).*

**H**ugo Lafayette Black, one of the nation's great senators and Supreme Court justices, was born in 1886 in rural central Alabama. When he was only six years old, little Hugo decided that listening to lawyers argue cases in a local courthouse was more fun than playing school-yard games. He loved politics and declared himself a Democrat almost before he could pronounce the word. Upon graduation from the University of Alabama Law School, Black became a police court judge and then a noted labor lawyer.

In 1923, when the Ku Klux Klan controlled the voting machinery in nearly every Alabama county, the politically ambitious Black made a decision that he spent the rest of his life regretting. He joined the Klan. With many Alabama lawyers and jurors members of the Klan, Black equated membership with courtroom success. Realizing his error, he soon resigned, but he enlisted help from Klan leaders in his successful race for the U.S. Senate in 1926.

When the Democrats took control of the Senate in 1933, at the beginning of the New Deal, Hugo Black drew on his skills as a prosecuting attorney to become nationally famous as a congressional investigator. In his aggressive questioning style, he gave witnesses the impression he already had the facts and wished them only to confirm them for the record.

On July 11, 1935, the Senate authorized a special Senate investigation of public utility company lobbyists. Black gained headlines as chairman of the special committee. Congress was then considering legislation designed to break up the giant "power trusts." The Senate inquiry unleashed on members' offices a blizzard of protesting telegrams. Black suspected that the utility lobbyists had orchestrated the campaign. In response, he introduced a bill that required all lobbyists to register their names, salaries, expenses, and objectives with the secretary of the Senate. By subpoenaing lobbyists, company officials, and telegraph office records, he was able to prove that of some 15,000 telegrams sent to Capitol Hill, only three were paid for by private citizens. The rest, he said, were the work of a "high-powered, deceptive, telegram-fixing, letter-framing, Washington-visiting \$5 million lobby."

Black's investigation resulted in the first congressional system of lobbyist registration. It also helped him win Franklin Roosevelt's first appointment to the Supreme Court. Despite lingering controversy over his early Klan membership, the former police court judge, between 1937 and 1971, compiled a record as the Court's greatest civil libertarian and defender of the Bill of Rights.

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January 5, 1937

## Republican Leader Front and Center

At the opening of the 75th Congress on January 5, 1937, Senate Republican Leader Charles McNary anticipated a difficult session. The 1936 congressional elections had produced a Senate with the lopsided party ratio of 76 Democrats to 16 Republicans. On that first day, McNary counted only one advantage—minor though it may have seemed at the time. He had become the first Republican floor leader to occupy a front-row, center-aisle seat in the Senate Chamber.

Until the early 20th century, the Senate operated without majority and minority leaders. In 1885, political scientist Woodrow Wilson wrote, “No one is the Senator. No one may speak for his party as well as for himself; no one exercises the special trust of acknowledged leadership.”

In the Senate’s earliest decades, leadership came principally from the president pro tempore and chairmen of major committees.

The modern system of Senate party leadership emerged slowly in the years from the 1880s to the 1910s. During this period, both parties organized formal caucuses and selected caucus chairmen who began to assume many of the agenda-setting roles of the modern floor leader.

Struggles with increasingly powerful presidents, the crisis of World War I, and the battle over the League of Nations spurred the further evolution of Senate floor leadership. While party caucuses began formally to designate their floor leaders, they gave little thought to where those leaders should be located within the Senate Chamber. If the leaders had desired to claim the front-row, center-aisle desks that have become the modern symbol of their special status, the presence of senior members comfortably lodged in those places dashed their hopes.

Finally, in 1927, the senior member who had occupied the prime desk on the Democratic side retired and party leader Joseph Robinson readily claimed the place. Republican leaders had to wait another decade, however, before retirement opened up the corresponding seat on their side. Finally, on January 5, 1937, Republican Leader McNary took his seat across from Robinson.

Later that year, Vice President John Nance Garner announced a policy—under the Senate rule requiring the presiding officer to “recognize the Senator who shall first address him”—of giving priority recognition to the majority leader and then the minority leader before all other senators seeking to speak. By 1937, Senate floor leadership had assumed its modern form.



*Charles McNary, senator from Oregon (1917-1944), served as Republican leader of the Senate from 1933 to 1944.*

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March 25, 1937

## Historical Records Saved

Word reached the Capitol on a sweltering summer's afternoon that invading forces had swept aside the defending American army at Bladensburg and would occupy Washington by dusk. While the president and his cabinet consulted demoralized commanders at a military outpost, the first lady packed a portrait of the nation's first president into her carriage and left town. Despite the wartime emergency of this 1814 summer, Congress had been in recess for four months.

Since 1789, Secretary of the Senate Samuel Otis had safeguarded the Senate's ever-expanding collection of records, including bills, reports, handwritten journals, Washington's inaugural address, and the Senate markup of the Bill of Rights. But Otis had died two days after the Senate adjourned in April 1814.

With the secretary's position vacant, a quick-thinking Senate clerk hastily loaded boxes of priceless records into a wagon and raced to the safety of the Virginia countryside. Nearly five years later, when the Senate returned to the reconstructed Capitol from temporary quarters, a new Senate secretary moved the rescued records back into the building. With space always at a premium in the Capitol, these founding-era documents, as well as those created throughout the remaining decades of the 19th century, ended up in damp basements and humid attics.

In 1927, a young Senate clerk named Harold Hufford entered a basement storeroom to find disordered papers and surprised mice. Under his foot lay an official-looking document that bore two large markings: the print of his rubber heel and the signature of John C. Calhoun. Hufford reported, "I knew who Calhoun was; and I knew the nation's documents shouldn't be treated like that."

For the next decade Hufford inventoried Senate records in more than 50 locations throughout the Capitol. Unfortunately, others had preceded him. Autograph seekers had routinely harvested signatures from presidential messages. Some notable state papers, such as Woodrow Wilson's message to the Senate on the outbreak of World War I, had simply vanished.

The opening of the National Archives building in the mid-1930s provided the opportunity to correct this dire situation. On March 25, 1937, the history-conscious Senate launched a rescue mission, perhaps less dramatic than that of 1814, but equally monumental, as it agreed to transfer these records—and all others no longer needed for current operations—to the National Archives.



*Bound copies of the Senate Journal are stored on shelves at the National Archives.*

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July 14, 1937

## Death of Senate Majority Leader

On the morning of July 14, 1937, a maid entered the Methodist Building, across the street from the Capitol. When she turned the key to the apartment of her client, the Senate majority leader, a terrible sight awaited her. There sprawled on the floor, a copy of the previous day's *Congressional Record* lying near his right hand, was the pajama-clad body of Arkansas Senator Joseph Taylor Robinson. At the height of his powers, with hopes of a Supreme Court appointment as his reward for services to a grateful president, the grievously over-worked 64-year-old Robinson had succumbed to heart disease.

Today, Robinson's portrait hangs just outside the Senate Chamber's south entrance. It suggests the warm and gentle demeanor he displayed when relaxing with friends. Another artist, however, might have captured a different side of his personality—the one that he occasionally displayed as Democratic floor leader. “When he would go into one of his rages,” reported a close observer, “it took little imagination to see fire and smoke rolling out of his mouth like some fierce dragon. Robinson could make senators and everyone in his presence quake by the burning fire in his eyes, the baring of his teeth as he ground out his words, and the clenching of his mighty fists as he beat on the desk before him.”

Joe Robinson entered the Senate in 1913, weeks before the Constitution's 17th Amendment took effect, as the last senator who owed his office to election by a state legislature. In 1923, his Senate Democratic colleagues elected him their floor leader, a post he retained for the next 14 years. Iron determination, fierce party loyalty, and willingness to spend long hours studying Senate procedures and legislative issues allowed Robinson, more than any predecessor, to define and expand the role of majority leader.

In 1933, at the head of a large and potentially unruly Democratic majority, he helped President Franklin Roosevelt push New Deal legislation through the Senate in record time. In the blistering hot summer of 1937, he rallied to the president's call a final time. Ignoring doctors' orders to avoid stress, he labored to salvage Roosevelt's legislative scheme to liberalize the Supreme Court by expanding its membership to as many as 15, adding one new position for every sitting justice over the age of 70. Robinson's death cost the president his “court-packing” plan and deprived the Senate of a towering leader.



*Funeral service for Joseph T. Robinson in the Senate Chamber.*

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October 17, 1939

## “Mr. Smith” Comes to Washington

From a back-row desk on the Democratic side of a crowded Senate Chamber, the idealistic freshman member labored into the 24th hour of a one-man filibuster. His secretary sat in the gallery frantically signaling which



A scene from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

rules would keep him from losing the floor. The vice president was in his place and so was every senator. No one moved. Finally the freshman’s leading antagonist, a cynical old-timer, rose to seek a unanimous consent agreement. He asked the Senate’s permission to bring into the chamber 50,000 telegrams, from all sections of the nation, demanding that the young senator end his futile crusade. Distraught, but vowing to continue his fight against an entrenched political establishment, the exhausted senator then collapsed.

As overturned baskets of telegrams cascaded paper over the junior member’s prone body, the senior senator suddenly changed course. Shaken

by what he had just seen, he dramatically confessed to corrupt deeds and demanded that the Senate expel him instead of his idealistic younger colleague. Recognizing the freshman senator’s vindication, the chamber erupted with joyful shouts as the vice president lamely tried to restore order.

The credits rolled and the lights came on. The audience that packed Washington’s Constitution Hall on October 17, 1939,

included 45 real-life senators and 250 House members. They had come to a world premiere of the Columbia Pictures film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. The film starred 30-year-old Jimmy Stewart as the noble-minded “Mr. Smith,” Claude Rains as the corrupt-but-redeemed senior senator, and Jean Arthur as Smith’s loyal secretary.

Paramount Pictures and MGM had previously turned down offers to purchase the story, fearing that its unflattering portrayal of the Senate might be interpreted as a “covert attack on the democratic form of government.”

Most of the senators attending the premiere responded with good humor to the Hollywood treatment, with its realistic reproduction of the Senate Chamber. Several, however, were not amused. Majority Leader Alben Barkley described the film as “silly and stupid,” adding that it made the Senate look like “a bunch of crooks.” Years later, producer Frank Capra alleged that several senators had actually tried to buy up the film to prevent its release.

*Mr. Smith* was an immediate hit, second only to *Gone with the Wind* in 1939 box office receipts. A congressional spouse named Margaret Chase Smith particularly enjoyed the premiere. Friends suggested that perhaps the time had come for a real-life story entitled “Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington.” Within eight months, the death of her husband and the voters of Maine’s Second Congressional District allowed the 42-year-old Mrs. Smith to begin writing that script.

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January 22, 1940

## “Lion of Idaho” Laid to Rest

On a cold morning in January 1940, crowds lined the Capitol’s corridors hoping for admission to the Senate Chamber galleries. Shortly after noon, as senators took their seats, several hundred House members filed into the chamber, followed by the Supreme Court, the cabinet, diplomats, and President Franklin Roosevelt. All had come for the funeral service of the 33-year Senate veteran whom *Time* magazine anointed as the “most famed senator of the century”—the progressive Republican from Idaho, William E. Borah.

A bronze statue of Borah now stands outside the Senate Chamber. It captures a large kindly man, with a sharply chiseled face and a head of hair resembling the mane of a lion.

William Borah began his Senate career in 1907. His deeply resonant voice, his natural skills as an actor, and his rich command of the English language at once marked him as a gifted orator. A third of a century later, at his Senate funeral, no one delivered a eulogy because no one could match his eloquence.

Affectionately known as the “Lion of Idaho,” Borah took fiercely independent views that kept him at odds with his party’s leaders. A progressive reformer, he attacked business monopolies, worked to improve the lot of organized labor, promoted civil liberties, and secured passage of constitutional amendments for a graduated income tax and direct election of senators.

Borah is best remembered for his influence on American foreign policy in the years between World Wars I and II. From his senior position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he sought to keep the nation free of entangling foreign alliances, defeating American efforts to join the League of Nations and the World Court. Concerned at evidence of America’s increasing desire to become an imperial power, Borah believed that other nations should be left free to determine their own destinies guided only by the rule of law and public opinion.

Other senators envied Borah’s saturation press coverage. Reporters routinely gathered in his office for informal mid-afternoon conversations. His pronouncements on the issues of the day appeared in print so frequently that one newspaper quipped, “Borah this and Borah that, Borah here and Borah there, Borah does and Borah doesn’t—until you wish that Borah wasn’t.”

The hundreds who filed past his coffin in the Senate Chamber displayed just how glad they were that Borah was.



*Bronze statue of Senator William Edgar Borah of Idaho (1907-1940), by Bryant Baker, located near the Senate Chamber’s entrance in the Capitol.*

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