

Floyd M. Riddick

Senate Parliamentarian, 1964-1974

Interview #10

Senate Ceremonies

(February 15, 1979)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

Ritchie: You've told me that one of your last official acts as parliamentarian was to plan the ceremony for the swearing in of Vice President [Rockefeller](#) in the Senate chamber. Could you give me a little background on how you got involved in that proceeding?

Riddick: Well, you see under the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, there's a new procedure by which we get a new vice president in the case of the death of the incumbent vice president, or if the vice president moves down to the White House. The first one, of course, was President [Ford](#). He was first selected as vice president, and then when President [Nixon](#) resigned he went down to become the president of the United States under this new procedure. Ford, having been the leader of his party in the House for some time, preferred to take his oath in the House of Representatives.

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So, he was not sworn in in the Senate at all. Actually, the first vice president under the new procedure to be sworn in in the Senate was Mr. Rockefeller.

I had urged the majority leader of the Senate, Senator [Mansfield](#), to insist that Mr. Ford be sworn in in the Senate, but Senator Mansfield said that he was going to give him his choice, since he was the man being sworn in.

Ritchie: Why did you insist that he be sworn in in the Senate?

Riddick: Because he was going to become the presiding officer of the Senate, and I felt that he should be sworn in in the Senate. But, Mr. Manfield said that since it was Gerald Ford's desire to be sworn in in the House, he wasn't going to intervene, or try to convince him to the contrary.

I had met with Mr. Ford in the House, but he just preferred to be sworn in over there, and so that

was it. The fact of the matter was that I made about a quarter-of-an-hour to a half-an-hour film with him as to how he was going to preside when he came over to the Senate as vice president. I don't know where the film is now, but it was an interesting procedure, because he had not had any experience in the Senate at all, and he desired that I come over and work with him a little before he came in and presided first in the Senate.

Ritchie: Why did they make a film of it?

Riddick: It was a news item, because he was going to become the presiding officer of the Senate, and all of his experience had been in the House. I forget which of the news services wanted it, but there were, gosh I don't know how many different photographers and news services there making a film of his anticipation of becoming the presiding officer of the Senate. Well, I actually retired on June 30th of 1974, but in

anticipation of an impeachment trial of President Nixon in the Senate, I was asked because of my years of experience to stay on until the end of the year. So on December 19th the next to the last session of the Senate that year, Vice President Rockefeller was sworn in and that's why it was one of my last official acts in the Senate as parliamentarian of the Senate.

Ritchie: What procedure did you follow on Rockefeller's swearing in?

Riddick: Well, we'd never done it before, so that's what made it a significant thing, as far as I was concerned. While they had sworn in vice presidents previously in the chamber, that had not been done for many a year, and not at all under the new procedure for electing a vice president to fill an unexpired term.

Ritchie: There was a tradition of that, that while the president was sworn in outside on the steps, the vice president was sworn in in the Senate chamber.

Riddick: That's correct, but we didn't have any of the specific procedures to follow, and more important than that, there were going to be many more important people present as far as our country was concerned than had been on

the previous occasions, because we were going to have present the president of the United States, the chief justice of the United States, and a great number of members of the House and Senate as well as other VIPs. As you know, they didn't used to have all this protection. The presidents didn't have all the security protection that they do now. So with the increased consciousness of security, we met on a number of occasions with various officers, police officers around the Capitol and so forth, to be sure that everything was set in the proper fashion for protection. On that occasion we met with them and it was finally agreed what the procedure was going to be as far as the security was concerned.

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Now, I think it is significant to point out that at that particular time Senator Mansfield, the majority leader, was out of the country. I believe he was in China at that time, or at least in some part of Asia; and also the Secretary of the Senate, Mr. Frank Valeo, accompanied the majority leader. So Senator [Byrd](#) of West Virginia, who was the assistant majority leader, was then the acting majority leader, and Darrell St. Claire played the role for the Secretary of the Senate. After we mapped out where everybody was going to sit -- President Ford was going to sit in front of the podium, the President *Pro Tem*, [Eastland](#), would preside for a while, and the new Vice President was going to come in, take his oath, sign the oath book (for a moment or two he had a seat there in the front) and then he was going to replace President *Pro Tem* Eastland and preside, for a few moments.

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Ritchie: You said that the Security Service was very concerned about this. Did they put any constraints on the proceedings?

Riddick: The responsible officers were meeting with us to work out how the seating should be arranged so that everybody would be seated in a place that would be suitable to them for watching or observing, in case some confusion did start. Of course, I didn't have too much fear about anybody coming in, because nobody could get in the chamber except those with passes. Sometimes, as you've seen, people who are not desired manage to get a pass. Anyhow, they were concerned, and we met together, and it was finally worked out that Darrell St. Claire and I would be the only staff on the rostrum, and all the others would be VIPs. They appointed a committee to escort the President and the new Vice President into the chamber. That was to consist of the Senator from West Virginia,

Mr. Byrd, the Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. [Hugh Scott](#), the Senator from Nevada, Mr. [Cannon](#), who was the chairman of the Rules Committee, and the Senator from Kentucky, Mr. [Cook](#), the ranking minority member of the Rules Committee, and since Mr. Rockefeller was from New York, they had Senators [Javits](#) and [Buckley](#) both, and from Michigan, Mr. [Griffin](#), and Senator [Moss](#) of Utah. I forget exactly why Senators Moss and Griffin were included -- oh, Mr. Griffin was the assistant minority leader, and Senator Moss of Utah was acting next to Mr. Byrd of West Virginia in the absence of Mr. Mansfield. The delegation came in, with their representatives, Mr. [Albert](#), who was then the Speaker, Mr. [Rodino](#) from New Jersey who was the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and then Mr. [McFall](#) and Representatives [O'Neill](#), [Rhodes](#), [Arends](#), and [Hutchinson](#), who came in and were announced before the ceremony started.

After the vice president was sworn in, the majority leader got permission that the new vice president be permitted to address the Senate chamber.

Ritchie: You pointed out earlier that Chief Justice Burger was there to swear in the vice president; could anyone else have sworn him in?

Riddick: Yes, as I recall Mr. Rockefeller preferred that the Chief Justice swear him in, I believe that was a request that he made. But at any rate somebody else could have sworn him in.

Ritchie: For instance, the president *pro tem* could have sworn him in.

Riddick: I believe so. But the president *pro tem* did not do it. After Mr. Rockefeller made his speech, the Senate adopted a resolution congratulating him on being the new vice president, and after we adopted that, the new vice president had been instructed where he was to sit, but there was a little confusion, so I went down to the front and brought him back around, and he "bounced" the president *pro tem* because the vice president

is the senior presiding officer under the Constitution. I point this out because I think it of significance; after all, I had helped to work out the complete details as to who was to be recognized and when, and what they were to say on the

occasion. But when the vice president came up to preside, the procedure was that he was to recognize Mr. Byrd first. So when the vice president took over the gavel, I whispered to him that he was to recognize the Senator from West Virginia first. In the *Record* the statement reads: "The Vice President. The Senator from West Virginia. I know him very well too!" I had said to him that it was the Senator from West Virginia, Mr. Byrd, and this in the *Record* is partly a response to me when I said, "There's the Senator from West Virginia." So that is why he added: "I know him very well, too!" Mr. Byrd had questioned Mr. Rockefeller at great

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length when he was testifying before the Rules Committee which had to pass on reporting his nomination favorably or unfavorably to the Senate.

Then after the ceremony in the Senate chamber they recessed and went into the Reception Room, S-207, for a little reception in honor of the new vice president. Just before they went in I had received a bunch of enrolled bills to be signed; they had already been signed by the Speaker as they always are; so I took them in the reception room and Mr. Rockefeller signed his first public laws at that reception. There were standing around him President Ford, Mr. Kissinger, the Secretary of State, and Mr. Albert, the Speaker of the House, together with a lot of other celebrities; and I have a picture of that which I've had framed, showing him signing his first bills.

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Ritchie: One thing I wanted to ask was about televising of the Rockefeller swearing-in. Was that the first time that Senate proceedings were televised?

Riddick: I believe so. I'm pretty sure it was. We had to pass a resolution. It's been quite a little while now and I wouldn't want to make an emphatic statement, but I'm almost certain that that was the first televising of Senate procedures. The Senate had on various occasions adopted special resolutions to authorize a picture to be taken of the Senate while it was sitting in session, as carried in publications like *The Capitol*, and *We The People*.

Ritchie: Did you have to design any of the ceremony to fit the television?

Riddick: Oh, no, they take just what ever they want to. But I did see some of it and it was very well done, it seems to me; that is, from the point of view of the photography and reproduction of exactly what went on.

Ritchie: The Senate has always been so reluctant to televise; and the House has begun a television program.

Riddick: Well, it's a closed-circuit system. I don't know if the Senate will get into it. They got the authority in the case of the New Hampshire election contest, but I don't know whether they will ever go further or not.

Ritchie: Is there just a deep sentiment against it?

Riddick: Well, there are a lot of things that cause them to hesitate, because there might be too much stage-play on the part of some senators; there might be some senators who will feel they will have to get in and say something, whether they wanted to or not in order to make an impression back in their respective home states. If you have a senator up here who never participates, somebody might say, "Well, what's the matter with our senator? Maybe we'd better get rid of him, he never participates in these programs."

So, there are a lot of factors involved, in which I don't think that I am competent to pass upon.

Ritchie: Do you think that televising the proceedings would have any affect on the parliamentarian, who is whispering to the presiding officer? Do you think the presiding officers will want to be seen repeating all the whispers from the Parliamentarian?

Riddick: I don't know. It's done very unnoticeably. We turn around and just whisper rather lowly. In fact, I think the public would accept this, because after all, parliamentary procedure is a very technical thing and every senator cannot inform himself to the letter of the law in a short period of time. Even then, there might be variable opinions, and he can't study all of the precedents and practices and be ready to rule instantaneously on a point of order that might be unexpectedly brought up. So, to keep uniformity it's good to have

somebody there to advise and counsel at all times. Of course, as you know, I might have mentioned before, that the parliamentarian doesn't really rule, he

only advised the chair how he should rule. The chair doesn't have to rule the way he is advised, but since he's not informed on all of these points, he's glad that he's got somebody to give him counsel and even write out the rulings if he's got time, so that he will be sure that he's ruling in accordance with the practices and precedents and rules of the Senate.

Ritchie: In terms of precedents, when you went back over the Rockefeller swearing-in, did you try to find out what they had done for previous vice presidents? What kind of precedent did you look for?

Riddick: No, we didn't think it was necessary to go back. The only thing that we were concerned about was if it was going to be broadcast that it be effectively done, efficiently done,

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and not embarrass anybody. Since there is no actual rule involved, since there is no binding precedent that would control the situation, we didn't think it was necessary. The thing to do was to do a good job at that time. It might be used in the future.

Ritchie: Also, I noticed that Rockefeller did make an address to the Senate. Is that common practice? Or do they have to particularly permit him to speak?

Riddick: The vice president doesn't have a right to address the Senate. I remember when Senator [Barkley](#) became vice president. He'd been majority leader for years, and the leader made the request that he be permitted to address the Senate before he became vice president. He thanked the Senate very much for this opportunity, and as he used the phrase, he said, "I'm glad of this opportunity to address the Senate before I go in to the world of oblivion." Because he has to keep quiet thereafter.

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He can only rule in case of points of order, or make announcements of appointments pursuant to certain laws and so forth. He does not participate in debate, nor does he make statements to the Senate as a participant or member of the Senate.

Ritchie: Is that true of all presiding officers as well?

Riddick: That's true. No presiding officer is supposed to make statements from the rostrum; he's the presiding officer. We have pretty well established, for example, that since he's the senator from his state, not to deprive him of his right

to protect his state; it's been established that if there is no other senator present to suggest the absence of a quorum, he can call for a quorum. You might have ten senators who wouldn't care to get a quorum, but he wants the side he's representing to be protected, so if he doesn't have somebody there to call a quorum from his side, we have the established

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precedent that he has a right to say, "In my capacity as a senator from so-and-so, I suggest the absence of a quorum. Say somebody puts a unanimous consent request, before he would say, "without objection, so ordered," since he's got to protect his side, and if he's afraid that his side would want to object to that request, it is necessary that he have a right to suggest the absence of a quorum in order to get an objector into the chamber.

Ritchie: There's a lot of ceremony in the Senate in many ways, things like the swearing in of senators, there's the counting of the electoral ballots, there are all of the things they go through on a regular basis. There are others that happen unexpectedly, and one of them is funerals in the Senate. Since I've been here there have been a few, and I've noted some confusion at times as to what has to be done, and when. You were involved in helping to set up

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some of the state funerals, both in the Rotunda and in the Senate chamber.

Riddick: There have been one or two in the Senate chamber since I've been working at the desk, but I don't think I participated in those determinations for the Senate chamber ceremonies and funeral services because Mr. Watkins was still parliamentarian. There has been some well established ceremonial practice, but it has varied from time to time. I remember when I first came up to observe procedures to write my doctor's dissertation on political and parliamentary procedure in the House of Representatives, I attended a service in the Senate chamber, and this service was to memorialize senators who had died since the last services of that nature. And at that time it was quite a formal thing, it was almost like going to church. You had your chaplain there, they pulled in a piano on the floor and they had a good pianist, and they had a soloist to sing, and then the

different senators would eulogize the passing of the senators who had gone to their Great Beyond. They made quite an affair of it, and these speeches had been prepared at great length (some of them didn't speak as long as others, of course), and all of the senators had prepared their remarks, instead of just spontaneously jumping up and making comments when they hear of the death of somebody. But that has more-or-less passed; for the last ten or fifteen years I've seen no such memorial services. It seems that the few that we have had were held in the Rotunda.

Ritchie: I know that McCarthy's funeral was in the chamber.

Riddick: In the Senate chamber, but Mr. Watkins was still around, and he had experienced a number of them, so he managed that.

Ritchie: Any widow can request a Senate funeral, can't she?

Riddick: They give deference. They can request it, but sometimes the Senate takes it

in its own hands to do it. Of course, they would consult the widow before doing it.

Ritchie: When they have a funeral in the chamber, I've noticed that they don't go on the Record.

Riddick: It's not a Senate session, that's right. It's an assembly for a said purpose.

Ritchie: So they just adjourn and the room is used for other purposes.

Riddick: That's right. They call the Senate to order for that purpose only. They might adopt a resolution to authorize the funeral service to be held at such-and-such a date, and that the Senate at that time would assemble for that purpose.

Ritchie: There is also the Rotunda funeral. How does the ceremony in the Rotunda differ from the ceremony in the chamber?

Riddick: Well, I don't know as there's too much difference. The point is, as this little brochure, which I think is worthwhile to mention, "Those Who Have Lain In State In The Rotunda," states it's a problem of who's entitled to the use of the

Rotunda. The Rotunda, being in the center of the Capitol, is part of both the House and the Senate. This little preface that the Architect of the Capitol prepared on the number of services held in the Rotunda, has a lead-off to this effect:

A grateful nation has often paid tribute to citizens of eminence at the time of death by honoring their remains in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol. In the 140 years since the Rotunda was completed, there have been twenty-four such state occasions. There is no law, written rule, or regulation governing the matter of who may lie in state in the Rotunda. Use of the Rotunda is controlled generally by concurrent action of the House and Senate, however the Rotunda has been used without full concurrence of both houses, especially during the adjournment or recess. The wishes of the family of a great individual are also respected by Congress.

Now there are some variations from this, of course. They say, "at the time of their death."

L'Enfant's body had been interred at Digg's farm in Prince George's County, Maryland. He died in 1825, but the Rotunda was used for his reinterment in 1909. So, they haven't all occurred at the time of the death. Likewise,

the unknown soldiers, they might have been killed months before they were brought over here, and the ceremonies occurred in the Rotunda. But anyhow, the main services were held on the occasion of the death. There have been twenty-four ceremonies in the Rotunda, of the twenty-four, the first resolution used was in the case of L'Enfant in 1909. Up until that time they had already had eight services without the use of resolutions and after that there were seven other occasions on which no resolution was used; in nine cases resolutions were used. If Congress is not in session you can't adopt a resolution, and I think that was the case in those since the 1909 event in which resolutions were not used. So it doesn't mean that since 1909 they haven't adopted a resolution each time when the Congress was in session.

Ritchie: Presumably, there are only types of people who are entitled to Rotunda funerals, and usually they are

presidents, vice presidents, or very distinguished senators like [Robert Taft](#). When something like this occurs, and it usually occurs unexpectedly, what is the triggering mechanism, what procedures are followed, and do the Senate and House organize the proceedings? Is it automatic?

Riddick: No, it's not automatic. For example, in the case of Senator Taft there were several meetings held to decide if they were going to hold a funeral in the Senate or the Rotunda. After consultation with Senator Robert Taft's son and all, I had suggested to the majority leader that they were very concerned to get his body to lie in state. It was agreed upon, and the Senate adopted a resolution to that effect, and invited the House. We only adopted a Senate resolution, but in that resolution the House was invited to participate in the ceremony. The same was true in the case of Senator [Dirksen](#). They haven't had many that were for

senators, I believe [Charles Sumner](#) was the only other senator before Mr. Taft who had lain in state in the Rotunda. But since then they had funerals for Senators Taft, Dirksen, and [Humphrey](#). Of recent, they had the Unknown Soldiers, President [Kennedy](#), General MacArthur, Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower, and an unusual one, J. Edgar Hoover in 1972.

Ritchie: How did Hoover get in there?

Riddick: I just don't know who instigated that. I wasn't in on that at all. In fact, there was no meeting held. It could have well come from the House side. I don't know. Then of course, there was a funeral for President [Lyndon Johnson](#), which was pursuant to a House Concurrent Resolution, and one for Senator Hubert Humphrey. He died while he was a Senator, but he had been vice president. So they have had very few for those who had just been senators only.

Ritchie: So, in a sense, the Rotunda ceremony has pretty well replaced the Senate chamber ceremonies?

Riddick: Well, not necessarily, because Senator [Russell](#) had become a very prominent senator and they did not ask that his body lie in state, and his ceremony was a peculiar situation. The Senate adopted a resolution for the

funeral services authorizing all the Senate to go to the funeral down in Georgia. His funeral was to be held at Winder, and we were to alight at the air force base near by and proceed to the funeral services in a body. But that was an unbearable day. It was the foggiest day they had had in ages down there, and I'm told that our plane got as low as eleven feet to the ground and could not see the ground sufficient to land, because you didn't know what you'd run into. You could see the ground, but you couldn't see anywhere far enough to be sure that you were landing both planes safely.

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All of the senators were on two planes. There was an agreement, some kind of an agreement, or at least an assertion by Mr. Mansfield that that was never going to occur again; that they were never going to allow all the senators under such circumstances to go in two planes for a funeral, for fear that the whole Senate would be wiped out. Both planes tried, both planes were heavily loaded, both planes tried two or three times, circling, trying to come down and alight. It was on the military air force base. I guess there was sufficient protection with radar and all, but the danger involved was unbelievable. So finally, when they tried the last round and couldn't see well enough to land, they took off and landed in Charleston, South Carolina, where it was clear, and held the funeral services by radio and television from the Naval Air Base in Charleston. It was an unusual situation. And I'll tell you,

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if you've ever seen an excited young fella, the high muckety-muck of the base was off that day and some lieutenant was left in charge, and he put that base under such guard as you've ever seen. The vice president sent for me, he was flying in Airforce 2, and he wanted to ask me a few questions, and I started over and by golly the military put guns right in my chest and said, "Where are you going?" Checking me out; I mean they really were on the alert that day. I'll bet that lieutenant was glad when those planes left that base!

Ritchie: On the overall, how important is ceremony in general to the Senate? Is it something that the senators themselves consider very important, or is it sort of a necessary nuisance that they have to go through?

Riddick: Well, I think the ceremony for funerals, except for the few that have lain in state, is sort of dying off. I think that might have been true for the years gone by, in

other words, we've had ups and downs. Right at the moment, the latest thing we had was sending everybody who wanted to go to attend the funeral of Senator [Allen](#) in Alabama. There was quite a crowd there. But unless it was somebody that has gained quite a bit of recognition in the Senate as in the above case and in the case of Mr. Rockefeller's funeral recently (the actual funeral was just a family funeral but they had a ceremony a few days later and all of the senators were permitted to go up to New York for that ceremony in his behalf). With these few exceptions, little emphasis is placed on such ceremonies. I guess it might have been that way always. Anyway, the Senate does not set aside days anymore for formal ceremony in the chamber as they used to. A few comments are made at the time of the death, and they hold a day for senators to make comments in the *Record*, but it's not a

memorial service like they used to hold. The senator might not even make the statement on the floor, he might just submit it and have it put in the *Record*. It's just not quite as formal as it used to be.

Ritchie: Is that something of a sign in the change in the Senate? They no longer wear the cut-off coats, and no longer give the great orations. Are they more business oriented than in the past"

Riddick: Well, I don't know that it's a case of the time in the Senate; it seems to me that it's a time of our whole concept throughout the world, our attitude toward death and so on. In fact we've got so many more senators, so many more representatives, and so many more people, that the attitude of the country seems to have changed somewhat, unless of course it's an assassination or something most unusual, for example the shooting of our ambassador in Afghanistan [Adolph Dubs]. If he'd

just died a normal death, you perhaps would have not seen anything about it. But the fact that he was murdered, and even by people of a foreign country, makes it an entirely different thing. This could be the same story in the case of our country here. Senator Allen, you know, was rather young, in perfect health everybody thought, he did have diabetic complications, but nobody anticipated that he would die so young, and it was all so sudden. That could be one of the reasons why his funeral was given special consideration by the Senate.

Ritchie: Do you think that ceremony other than just for funerals is also declining? The whole ceremonial approach to business in the Senate, the style in which they conduct their business?

Riddick: I'm not sure. Take for example the swearing-in of new senators. I believe in the years gone by they swore in senators according to the time that their state became a member of the

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Union, or became a state. But ever since I can recall, they swear-in senators alphabetically regardless of the state they are from, and four at a time. This is an established procedure that they follow. Now, that's not quite ceremonial in the way that you are speaking, but it is quite a ceremony. The tickets for the seats in the gallery are issued to the people who are close friends or members of the family of the senators being sworn-in, and they make quite a little to-do of it. And this is done every two years. I guess we'll continue that way. Also occasionally you have the two bodies meeting in joint session for a ceremony in honor of the anniversary of Lincoln or of Washington, just like we read Washington's Farewell Address. That we do every year. That wasn't begun until the later part of the 1800's, but now we do it every year for the anniversary. While very few

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attend particularly, you'll have a few in there, and they go through that ceremony. So it's hard to say. It depends on the type of ceremony as much as anything else.

[End of interview #10]