

**Interview with Rep. Carl Albert (D-OK), Democratic Leader**

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Spending attitude as a criterion for committee membership selection—"I'd say that's taken into account. If you have a wild spender, he'd have a pretty hard time with the Committee on Ways and Means [the committee on committees for the Democrats]. But on the other hand, if he were very conservative, he'd have a difficult time, too. I'd say that in four out of five cases, the man is chosen for a balance between conservatism in spending money and responsiveness to the party leadership and the party position. He can't be fighting the leadership all the time on foreign aid or public power and the things like that which you have to have."

He mentioned regional representation first as an assignment criteria, but within region other considerations come into play. Rep. Donald H. Magnuson (D-WA) was defeated in 1962—"there was a vacancy in that whole Northwest-Rocky Mountain region. You had two candidates—Walter Baring of Nevada and Judy Hansen of Washington. They both wanted it. Baring was a man you couldn't have. The administration didn't trust him. The party couldn't trust him. He was an enemy of foreign aid and other things. I don't know all the strings that were pulled to make sure the Ways and Means Committee didn't elect him; but I'm certain that outside forces were at work. The job was given to Mrs. Hansen."

"Sure there is resentment against the Committee. They have special privileges, let's face it, and the other members get jealous. They meet all the time when Congress is in session. Their bills are privileged and come to the floor without a rule. They get special treatment from the departments. Their colleagues must reckon with them. They have a life and death power over things. You hear people say, 'that isn't fair.' You hear that a lot. When John Ranking [D-MS] was here and was chairman of Veteran's Affairs, he used to tear into the Committee on Appropriations and say what a lot of the other members were thinking.... Some committees are just more powerful than others. Back in the [1946 Legislative] Reorganization Act they tried to make all committees major committees, and it was the biggest flop you ever saw. Anybody who tells you that Post Office and Civil Service [Committee] and Appropriations [Committee] are equal ought to have his head examined."

"As [Democratic] whip I wasn't consulted [on committee assignments] at all. As [Majority] leader, I talk about it with the Speaker [John McCormack of MA] and with the members of the [Ways and Means] Committee. I have candidates, of course, and will talk about them. The Speaker's the man to see on that really. Many times, the Speaker makes the selection and the committee just goes along. But once in a while the committee goes against the wishes of the Speaker. And I've had candidates of mine rejected. On the whole, I try not to interfere in what the committee does. They are the constituted authority, and once you start meddling with them you get into trouble. They are set up to do the job. So I try to stay out of it as much as I can. The only time I say anything is when I think the thing is serious. You may watch the first few selections to see how things are going."

“It’s a very popular Committee [Appropriations]. You get on one of those subcommittees, for instance, and they are a clan. They’re more of a club than the Senate. They get what they want from each other and from the other subcommittees. They have a lot of influence over the departments they appropriate for.”

“The members of the Appropriations Committee have respect for the wishes of the leadership.” Then he went on to say (though I don’t see the connection exactly) that “a Congressman who does his work and doesn’t ask for much gets along much better than a person who is demanding something all the time. A person who will give as well as receive will get much more in the long run. You have these demanders who may get something, and people will say the way to get something is to fight them. But you don’t get as much that way in the long pull.”

The present [party] leadership doesn’t have much influence with [Appropriations Committee Chairman] Clarence Cannon [D-MO]. And he controls that Committee. He can make or break those subcommittee chairmen. He fought with [Speaker Sam] Rayburn [D-TX], too, but he was afraid of Rayburn, or at least I think he was. Rayburn had more seniority than he did. But the [present] Speaker has less seniority and the new leadership, too. I think this is why Cannon staged his sit-down strike last year.” The point is that the leaders cannot reach Cannon, and they can’t deal with the subcommittee because Cannon keeps control of them and can hurt them. He called Cannon “a great scholar” and went on after this to make his pitch for the stress on personality, that one cannot understand the system at all without understanding the personalities who work the system.

“Sometimes a man is so popular with the Committee on Ways and Means that he gets on the Committee in violation of all the ordinary rules. That was the case with Henderson Lanham of Georgia. He got on the Committee [in 1957] even though Prince Preston was already on the Committee from Georgia. But he was just one of the most well liked men in the House. The exceptions are invoked as frequently as the rules in these things.”

Rep. Albert Thomas (D-TX) fought Rep. Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) for his Appropriations seat, and Thomas got it. He got it within the Texas delegation strictly on a seniority basis. His point was that “the Ways and Means Committee wouldn’t care [to] buck the recommendations of a large delegation. Otherwise, it would ruin the work of the Committee on Ways and Means.”

He pushed Rep. Tom Steed (D-OK) not as Democratic whip but simply as the dean of the Oklahoma delegation. They had to wait, he said, Steed wanted it from the time he got to Washington. He wanted it at the time Rep. William G. Stigler (D-OK) went on the Committee in 1949—with respect to Steed, “he wasn’t too popular with some member of the Ways and Means Committee at the time. I don’t know why. But I had to wait a few years to get him on. Our state isn’t large enough to claim a seat in its own right.”

He spoke of the southerners always being in positions of power on the Committee. You can’t keep them down forever he said with considerable feeling.

Telephone conversation with respect to the conflict between Rep. Oren Harris (D-AR) and Rep. Edith Green (D-OR). Harris has the medical school bill in his [Interstate and Foreign Commerce] committee and Edith Green [on Education and Labor Committee] has some medical school provisions in her higher education bill so the best idea, he said, is to keep it out of the higher education bill and pass it that way. The problem is the jurisdictional dispute between committee chairmen. “You got a jurisdictional problem there. You have to handle both Harris and Mrs. Green with kid gloves. And you’ve got Judge [Howard] Smith [D-VA, Chairman of the Rules Committee] who can play cat and mouse in a situation like that.” The point is that he was afraid that if the medical school business got into the higher education bill some people who would vote for the bill might have to vote against it on jurisdictional grounds—on the grounds that it really belonged in the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee.

Note by Fenno: What finally happened was that the White House met with the leadership, Harris, and Green and decided that the Harris bill should be the one to clear the Rules Committee first, as soon as Ray Madden (D-IN) returned from convalescing at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Edith Green got so mad that she put the higher education bill in cold storage indefinitely. Charlie [Goodell, R-NY] says it would have been very easy if the White House had simply asked Mrs. Green to delete all of the medical school provisions from her bill—that she would have done it. He says that she got made because of the way it was done—that they waited until she had written these provisions into her bill and then asked her to take them out.