

Interview with Rep. Gordon Canfield (R-NJ)

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Very cooperative—a Republican liberal and not really an Appropriations Committee type; willing to criticize—not very powerful.

“Sometimes I wonder how I did get on the Committee.... Sometimes I don’t think John Taber [R-NY, ranking member on Appropriations Committee] will miss me. But he’s been kind to me, in his way.... There had always been a New Jersey man on the Committee, and in 1945 there was a vacancy. I suppose he must have approved.... In 1948, I was chairman of the [Treasury and Post Office] subcommittee. That was pretty quick. But Frank Case [R-SD] came to me and wanted to be chairman of the subcommittee. Maybe he and John Taber had got together. He came in here and asked me if I wanted it. He was a senior man on the Committee, but I was senior man on the subcommittee. I said I was going to stand on my rights and said I hoped there wouldn’t be any trouble about it. He said, ‘No, of course not—that he just wanted to see if I was serious about it.’ I always thought maybe John Taber would have liked it if he [Case] had been chairman of the subcommittee.”

Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO) “more able” than Taber—thinks quicker—Taber doesn’t articulate very well, but he’s a student of appropriations and he makes the subcommittee assignment.

“When Cannon and Taber work together they are more powerful than the other forty-eight [members], divided as they always are. They have been working together more often in recent years. If they agree on something, that’s it. It’s very rarely changed—never changed, I might say.”

He said he hadn’t gotten to know Rep. Harold C. Ostertag (R-NY) and described the subcommittees as “autonomous.”

He admits that Cannon and Taber screen the Committee (?)

Cannon put Rep. Otto E. Passman (D-LA) on Mutual Security (foreign aid) “to do a job.”

“Mr. Cannon keeps driving it into us that we shouldn’t encroach on the jurisdiction and prerogatives of the legislative committees. But when it’s necessary and convenient to do so, we do it, and then get a rule to protect the language. We do that.” It causes resentment—“They feel that we arrogate too much power unto ourselves and that we want to be the last word on everything.”

Re. junk-mail provision in the Post Office appropriations bill: Cannon put it in—“He has a fetish about it. He came to the subcommittee and asked us to put it in. Out of courtesy to him, we put it in. John Taber didn’t want it, but he didn’t want to get Clarence riled up. Some of the younger men were against it, but they didn’t dare take him on.... (After conference and disagreement with the Senate) we had a voice vote insisting on our

position. If we had a roll call vote, I'd vote against it. And I think it might lose. So there it is, in there out of courtesy to one member. It's the first time, though that he's ever asked our subcommittee to put something in. I don't feel like proposing that we knock it out. But I've taken him on before, and he knows that I will.

Full Committee almost always goes along with subcommittee—too much, he says. “Some of these chairmen make it a personal matter. Passman did in there today. He said that he'd been on this subcommittee for eight or ten years, that he knew what was in there, and that this bill was his handiwork.”...“He knows more about the bill than any living man. He has wonderful documentation. But he's so against the whole idea that he can't be objective at all.”

First big gripe: “The clerks have an inordinate amount of power. They stay on with one [sub]committee and become a repository of all the information about a subcommittee's work. Then they become ‘Mr. Indispensable’ and the first thing you know they run the whole show. They have too much power and should be rotated.... Some of the subcommittee chairmen let them do it. The work is so mechanical and tedious that it's easier to let the clerks do it. If you get a chairman who doesn't want to work, the clerk will just move in and run the whole show. On some of these subcommittees, they do everything, and it's wrong.”

Second big gripe: “We don't follow through on these bills and police the spending of money after the appropriation. We say ‘We're the number-one committee, the most powerful committee, and we've done our work and passed the bill. Let's wait until next year.’ Our subcommittee [Treasury and Post Office] does better than most I think, but we should check up a lot more than we do. We are understaffed to do this.”

“There is a little group within the Committee that runs things. Cannon relies pretty heavily on Al Thomas [D-TX], [Louis] Rabaut [D-MI], [Harry] Sheppard [D-CA], and [George] Mahon [D-TX]. Taber relies on Frank Bow [R-OH] – and Gerry Ford [R-MI] is a comer, if he watches his step.”

He thinks he and Subcommittee Chairman J. Vaughn Gary (D-VA) get along the best of any of the subcommittee pairs—He sees similar backgrounds and respect for each other. “Even when we part company in [sub]committee or on the floor, we are never at swords points.... In fact, we have a reputation for keeping down controversy, and members will even absent themselves from [sub]committee meeting. They'll come to me and say, ‘Everything's all right isn't it? I'll take your word for it.’ Of course, our field is not as controversial as some.”

Relations with agencies are good: “They are a lot better with Treasury than with Post Office. For one thing you have better leadership in Treasury. [Postmaster General Arthur] Summerfield is a man that won't brook any interference. He has to go right ahead and won't listen to you.” He came back to this again, and I think he called Summerfield pigheaded.

Re subcommittee colleague Rep. John R. Pillion (R-NY), he shook his head: “Oh, he’s a cutter alright. Boy! He could become chairman of the subcommittee next year—then Summerfield will quit alright. I honestly feel that if I were to continue on, I’d have real trouble getting along with him. It’s nothing he’s done; it’s just his conception of what he’s doing is so different from mine. He really went after the Post Office Department this year. He wanted to get a post-office modernization done in Buffalo, and he couldn’t get it on his terms, so he turned against the whole program.”

“The House members have to walk over to the Senate side. They don’t like that at all. We’ve asked the Senators, ‘Why don’t you come over here once in a while?’ but they won’t. They’re the appeals court over there, and we don’t like having to walk over.” He went into the business of appropriations not being mentioned in the Constitution, and said that Cannon keeps telling them that it is settled.

“A conference is anything but businesslike”—and he made a motion of juggling balls in the air. Then he talked a bit about splitting the difference and cutting the figure low to get it in the middle.

“We feel we’re expected to cut. Then there’s the little game that goes on with the executive departments padding their budgets because they know they will be cut. If I were over there, knowing how the Committee operates, I’d pad my budget, too.” He didn’t approve of that.

He spoke about the typewriter pressures and smiled—spoke of it as terrific pressure and said he wouldn’t give in. His own New Jersey Senator called to put heat on.... Re. the interest group—“They raised such a hullabaloo, we let them state their case in a hearing. Usually, we don’t do that.” Only executive departments get hearings. When Senate made inquiries as to solidity of House objections—“We told them we would never give it up and that we would sit in conference till doomsday.” The Senate let the prohibition stay and all was OK—no typewriters to be bought, or something like that.

Re. Coast Guard Reserve: “They tried hard to get me not to push for the restoration. They said it would set a precedent, *first bill out and all*. But I did and we won it.” Interesting re. opening gates to amendments.

Re. conference: “Someone on the other side will say, ‘Sen. So-and-so wants this, or Sen. So-and-so is interested in this.’ He isn’t on the committee, and he hasn’t attended the hearings, but he wants something, and they look out for him. He isn’t in the conference committee room, but he’s in there, just the same. It’s a club, and they are trying to help him out. Maybe he just spoke to the clerk or the chairman and said, ‘I want this in,’ and ‘I don’t want this in,’ and they’ll fight for him in conference.”

His overall criticism is that it’s too cursory.

Re. Bureau of Narcotics: “We’re tremendously impressed with their leadership. [Commissioner H.J.] Anslinger is one of the finest men in government. I think they are

even too modest in what they ask for. I think—I know—they could use a lot more money than they get right now.”

Speaks of Passman and his “little dance” and says he has collected a record of real malfeasance such that if you oppose the foreign aid program you have plenty of good material to oppose it with.

“Another thing they do that is all wrong. When you had supplemental bills, the agencies used to come before the grass roots [sub]committee that knew the bill. But a couple of years ago, Cannon set up a deficiency subcommittee and gave it to Al Thomas, a real axe man. The idea was to give them a cursory hearing and knock them down—and they do. They range over the whole of government, and they don’t know the bills they’re dealing with. So when they come to the floor, we have to change them. Or, we have to go to the chairman and say, ‘You’re all wet here. You don’t know what you’re doing.’ Of course, you take John Rooney [D-NY]—he sits on that [sub]committee. So when they come to the immigration service they say, ‘John, you know all about that;’ and he says, ‘Don’t cut them.’ But it hurts our agencies, Post Office and Treasury. Maybe it was an honest-to-goodness effort to hold things down. But it looks like it reflects mistrust of our regular [sub]committees.” To some extent, his complaint bears out Cannon’s reasons—he is saying that his agencies are hurt because they are cut too much, and he is objecting to large cuts in his pet agencies