

Interview with Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-MA)

June 9, 1959

General remarks: A protégé of Rep. Albert Thomas (D-TX), chairman of the Independent Offices Subcommittee and Special Deficiencies Subcommittee; favored by Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-MO); a real comer.

Re. Thomas: "You can't beat a strong subcommittee chairman on the floor. You just don't beat him."

"When you perform well on the floor when you bring out a bill, and members know that you know the bill, you develop prestige with other members of Congress. They come over and ask you what you think, because they know you've studied it. You begin to get a reputation beyond your subcommittee...and you get inner satisfaction, too. You don't feel that you're just down here doing nothing." This is a very perceptive comment by a man who has just reached this stage. He is between the old and the newcomer, and he is just beginning to feel a part of things – no longer feels frustrated. He has played according to the system, and is reaping the rewards – slowly, but surely. He is regarded, too, as a future leader. But he still speaks of "they."

Re. Independent Offices Subcommittee activity: "It's a Thomas performance. He and the clerk go over it, and when you come in for markup, it's all laid out cold, and the members almost always agree. He goes very fast in markup, and sometimes you find that something you were interested in has gone by. And maybe he knows you were interested in it. But he's courteous and fair if you call it to his attention.... He knows the bill backwards and forwards. He works hard, awfully hard, and the members know it. He's worked with these people for years, and he knows them like a book. He does more work on the bill than all the other members combined. I know I don't do as much as I would if I knew I had to have the information. But in the hearings he develops his case so completely. Has his questions ready and takes maybe two days questioning the witness. When he's through, there isn't much left to ask about; it's all in the record. I'd say it's a Thomas performance."

Re. subcommittee reports: "I don't think I've ever seen a [sub]committee report before going to the full Committee.... John Rhodes [R-AZ] came up to me one day and said, 'What goes with these reports? Don't you ever see them?' I said, 'Come to think of it, I don't think I ever have.' I guess that's just SOP [standard operating procedure] around here...members sometimes say, 'What if it happens that someday your subcommittee reports out a bill that you don't see and aren't in favor of at all?' But it never happens that way. Maybe a sentence here or there, but never the general report." Occasionally, therefore, members will object to language in report and will get it changed, i.e., Cannon versus Strauss [Acting Commerce Secretary Lewis Strauss?] – the language of the report was very strong and they changed it.

“When you’re on the Committee, people expect you to cut – other members and the general public.” He agreed that the Committee does like to cut: “They talk a lot about it. They take, not exactly pride, but a lot of satisfaction in cutting the budget.”

“Thomas says, ‘They always ask for more than they need and get more than they can use,’ and, ping, he’ll cut ‘em a million, and that’s it.” Sometimes the Committee uses a 2 percent cut across the board: “They can absorb it,” says Thomas, and Boland’s attitude is that Thomas knows.

He feels strongly that his attitude toward spending has changed since he got on the Committee. I can’t recall the quote, but it was something to the effect that you become more careful about spending money – the more you see, the less you like to let things go – he spoke about a “sense of responsibility.”

“You get a real appreciation of these people in the agencies. Most of them do a darn fine job. Some of these budget officers have a vast knowledge of their subject. When you see this, you say that you’ve got to be careful with their budget, because they are doing a good job. When a man comes along, and makes a presentation like this, he’s sure to find some friends within the Committee.”

He speaks of the pressure to stick together; he agrees that the group is tightly knit, and his evidence is the resentment aimed against the Appropriations Committee on the Thomas Amendment to the housing bill. But he feels that the other members “respect” the members of the Appropriations Committee.

The public works bill is not laid out so “cold” as the independent offices bill [in the Public Works Subcommittee]; everybody gets plenty of chances to speak.

He stressed hard work and a sense of responsibility.

He got on the Committee by going to see Majority Leader John McCormack (D-MA), and he also went around and talked to all the members of Ways and Means; McCormack looks after the Massachusetts people, and takes care of vacancies; he didn’t talk to the Speaker [Sam Rayburn (D-TX)]. He was the only New Englander on the Democratic side, and there were a large number of vacancies. I guess he means he was the only New England man who applied, since Rep. John Fogarty (D-RI) was on the Committee.

In the 84th Congress (1955-1957), Cannon took away some of Thomas’s agencies (Atomic Energy Commission was one) [from Independent Offices Subcommittee], and there was a fight. But he gave back some of the agencies and that resolved it. Boland thought that Cannon probably took away more than he wanted and gave back some. “He’d do it that way.” But there was no vote, he says.

He says that Cannon couldn’t remove a subcommittee chairman – that he would need the consent of the Committee to do it; he couldn’t do it – “He would run into a hornet’s nest there.”

He has real feelings for Cannon: Sometimes you can't tell whether he (Cannon) is for or against you. But he thinks that the other members of the Committee like Cannon, that Cannon is popular; which is quite different from the view held by some others anyway, and most others, it would seem.... He calls Cannon a "genius."

Cannon moved Atomic Energy Commission and the Bureau of Reclamations to the jurisdiction of the Public Works Subcommittee so that he (as chairman of that subcommittee) could handle them.