

Interview with Rep. Frank T. Bow (R-OH)

1 June 1959

General remarks: friendly, rather pompous looking but not pompous acting, guarded in his answers but cooperative.

Why get on the Committee? His case, he said, would be interesting but not much good for the book (he was wrong). He first came here and was on the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. "I was happy—it didn't have much to do with my district—so I couldn't get into trouble there." He said there were two reasons why he did not seek Appropriations: 1) he didn't think he had a chance, 2) he says he's lazy, and he had heard that Appropriations was an awful lot of work. However, Speaker Joseph W. Martin (R-MA) called and asked him if he wanted to go on Appropriations. He said no, that he was happy where he was. Martin tried to persuade him, and he said no. Then he got a call from Appropriations Committee Chairman John Taber (R-NY): "Why don't you want to come on my Committee? Don't put it that way, Mr. Taber; I just said I was happy where I was. Well, I picked you for my Committee." Taber picked three men that time. Why did he pick him? "Because in my first term I had established myself as an ultra conservative." So, he said, I was "tapped" for the job. He thinks this is rare, but I'm beginning to conclude differently....

Would he change committees now? He thinks you can learn about government quicker on this Committee than on any other. "It's a fascinating job and a responsible job."

Regarding his subcommittee assignment: Taber asked him what he wanted. He said Interior Subcommittee. Taber said no; he wanted to put Mr. Hamer H. Budge (R-ID) on that subcommittee. So he said State Department, and he got it—it was then the State, Justice and Commerce Subcommittee—Mr. Clarence Cannon (D-MO) later split them up when he became Committee Chairman.

Advice to young men: "Don't come on unless you want to work. It's a man-killing Committee. You work harder here than on any other committee in the House."

With respect to cuts he said: The bureaus expect cuts and they put "grease" in there to be cut out. The House sometimes cuts deeper than they feel they ought to in anticipation of Senate cuts. Regarding bureau padding: "They do the same thing we do with the Senate." This seems like a game.

Regarding the prison boost: He called it "power politics." "John Rooney [D-NY] and I were right" but Rep. Thomas J. O'Brien (D-IL) and Majority Leader John W. McCormack (D-MA) lined up the Democrats to vote for the prison to help Rep. Kenneth J. Gray (D-IL). "He's got a tough district, and they wanted to help reelect him."

He agreed that amendments have the best chance when backed by a subcommittee member or members. In the deficiency bill last year, the Development Loan Fund was given a hundred million by the subcommittee and knocked out in full Committee—

Rooney and Bow (and Eddie Boland, D-MA) pushed the amendment on the floor, and it was put back in.

On subcommittee activity: their recommendations are rarely changed in full committee. The subcommittee has gone into it and knows the situation....

Regarding the markup: “frequently the chairman has a figure which he states, sometimes he will have no figure and he’ll turn to me and say, Frank, what do you think? Maybe I’ll have a figure. It’s very flexible. Each member has a chance to say what he thinks, and we’ll move it around. Sometimes it takes a long time.” The result is a compromise and normally a unanimous committee report. The chairman can control his subcommittee “but he can’t be a tyrant.” He states that he doesn’t mean Mr. Rooney, chairman of State, Justice, and the Judiciary Subcommittee: “Rooney is a rabid partisan on the floor, but he is a very fair man in the subcommittee.” The point is that he questions in such detail that there’s little left for the rest to do....

The subcommittee and the full Committee take it up “item by item”—there is no across-the-board stuff. “Item by item” refers to the care with which the job is done. He kept saying that “the ranking minority member can stop” an arbitrary subcommittee chairman. He doesn’t see power very visibly or nakedly.

Regarding partisan politics—“very little.”

Taber and Cannon [Ranking member and Chairman of Appropriations] work closely together.

Regarding Cannon’s power: “I don’t see where he has the power. Maybe there can be retribution but I haven’t seen any. He can’t walk over anybody.” Later on when we were talking about establishing subcommittees and moving them around he said, “that’s the place where he has power.” Example, the Special Deficiency Subcommittee, taking the Federal Aviation Administration out of Commerce, separating Commerce from State and Justice. The Special Deficiency Subcommittee was set up because Cannon wanted to get a cut. Mr. Albert Thomas (D-TX), Special Deficiency Subcommittee Chairman, is “a cutter of the first water.” The three conservatives on the Republican side were all budget cutters by reputation. (Thomas told me that he picked his three members, Mr. Micheal J. Kirwan (D-OH) who is tough, Mr. Rooney who is tough, and Mr. Boland his favorite) On the Deficiency Subcommittee he said, “I never had such a frustrating experience. When they brought in the State and Justice bill I knew what they were talking about, but on Agriculture and Defense I was lost.” They made “meat-axe cuts”—very irresponsible—“on pay raises, ten percent cut across the board. John Rooney and I wouldn’t let them do it in State and Justice, but in other cases where there was nobody there to defend them they got a meat-axe cut”—“that’s no way to appropriate.”

He spends a lot of time and got very heated discussing the importance of knowing your subject and related what he did regarding Civil Aeronautics Administration: “I studied the technical aspects of aviation so that I knew all about control towers, etc. I went up in

the experimental plane and studied the instruments up front. I went on the ground and studied their operations.” You have to do this in order to appropriate sensibly, he said.

Regarding Foreign and Domestic Commerce Bureau: “they’re empire builders; we know what they’re doing; they’re getting over into the territory of the State Department.”

Regarding the attitudes of other committee members: they don’t like us—the pet project idea came in again. He said he wouldn’t be surprised if the Committee was abolished someday. Powerful men are opposed to it—for example, Mr. Carl Vinson (D-GA), Armed Services Committee Chairman, and Mr. McCormack.

Do your constituents understand? “I don’t know. At home they introduced me at speeches as a member of the most powerful committee, Appropriations; but my constituents are a lot more interested in who I appoint as rural mail carriers than they are in Appropriations.”

Regarding the Budget Bureau: recently there has been more antagonism than previously. He spoke of usurping the functions of Congress. But he thought there should be budget submission, that is budget control.

The House goes into detail much more than the Senate. The House is closer to the people than the Senate, and the people want economy.

We shouldn’t be “prosecutors” so much, he said, but we should be in a “quasi judicial” capacity—“we take the attitude that something’s wrong here and we’re going to catch you.” He complained about this, but made it quite clear how it is done—the Committee does “prosecute.” He says that the fault lies with the Executive Branch. “They don’t come up here and put their cards on the table and say we made a big mistake on this one”—“they come up here and paint a rosy picture, then we stumble on to something and find it’s a mess.” His point is the lack of trust. The House begins by being suspicious. He cites Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover—a model budget—he lays it on the line and doesn’t get cut. He says that National Bureau of Standards has done well except for one building request.

Regarding communication with bureau people: “Yes, all the time, especially when you’re ranking minority member like I am.” They come in to get changes, which they can get according to a “custom that has grown up over the years,” with the consent of the subcommittee chairman and the ranking minority member. No very large sums involved, but if they get into difficulty they come up and ask him.

He has a minority clerk —at \$4,500 a year. He puts her on the payroll in his office—you can’t get good men. He once had a retired lawyer but that was a rare case.