

Interview with Rep. Elford A. Cederberg (R-MI)

May 27, 1959

General remarks: cocky, friendly, not terribly knowledgeable.

Why on the Committee? The Committee sees the whole picture; it is generally recognized as one of the important committees; most members “covet” a position on Appropriations; “Everything comes to a focus in the Appropriations Committee. You can learn about everything, not just one area.”

How get on Committee? The Michigan delegation has an over-weighted vote in the Committee on Committees – “more strength than some others.” He went to the head of his state delegation, “I apprised him of my wishes.” “The Chairman has a great deal to say about who gets on the Committee” [Cederberg is referring to John Taber (R-NY), the ranking minority member and a former Appropriations Chairman] – “the Chairman, I guess, did some checking around in my area. After all, I was new and he didn’t know me. People told me that they were called to see if I was – well, unstable or apt to off on tangents.... Well, to see whether or not I had any preconceived notions about things and would not be flexible – inflexible about things – whether I would oppose things even though it was obvious.” This last was in response to my question of what did he mean by unstable. I asked would the tendency to spend be a factor here. He replied, yes that would be a factor.

On learning the ropes: “Nobody tells you anything around here, you find out for yourself by living with it. It’s like any other experience; you live with it, that’s all. There’s a lot to be said for experience.” He volunteered that a man should have legislative committee experience first so as to have special knowledge.

Why does the House cut? Every bureaucrat wants to enlarge his operation. He sees only his own bureau; sometimes the House cuts in anticipation of Senate boosts.

“Sometimes in subcommittee we compromise on the understanding that we will stick together, come hell or high water. You’re much less likely to get rolled on the floor that way.”

Regarding cutting or spending moods: “Yes, the mood of the times has a lot to do with it” – more applicable to general cutting than to the House. He thinks the House will raise appropriations when some pet project comes along, like the prison for southern Illinois: “You have the state against you there, the boys from Illinois will work hard and other people will go along and then maybe they’ll want something later and Illinois will go along; that’s the way it’s done.”

The subcommittee recommendations are usually accepted in the full Committee.

“There’s less chance for party politics on Appropriations than on most committees.”

“If people aren’t apprised of a situation, they will go along with the leadership” (the prison boost).

The leadership of the Committee is very influential. He stresses experience and “the respect” members have for the chairman – the only thing the Chairman can do to punish them is to change their subcommittee.

“Over the years there develops a relationship between the chairman of the subcommittee and the bureaus.”

He mentions the superior record of economy and efficiency of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); he did not elaborate, at all.

Regarding the field of health, education and welfare (HEW): He spoke of the “emotional reaction.” “Sometimes we give them a little more than I think is good fiscal policy.”

The Wage and Hour Division is “very controversial: They want to start a lot of new studies – getting into this and that – whenever the policy is no new programs, they get cut.”

One Congressman, not Al, said that interest group pressure is not so great as pressure from other Congressmen.

Regarding the presentation of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover: “some do their homework a little better than others;” “J. Edgar Hoover always comes in well prepared and lays it on the line.”

He couldn’t explain the difference between the Patent Office and the National Bureau of Standards (NBS): “nobody has a **** * for” NBS; maybe people feel that more of NBS projects should be reimbursable; he also cites the complexity of a field; Congressmen tend to be “skeptical” – for example, United States Information Agency (USIA) –.

Regarding Social Security Administration (SSA): Most of its budget is chargeable to trust funds, and it is easier to let it go by and not to cut if it is not chargeable to the budget; he also spoke of the emotional human element.

Regarding other members: “they feel that the Appropriations Committee is a House of Representatives unto itself;” resentment, not enough liaison between Appropriations and legislative committees; he blames it on the lack of time; not a desire of the Appropriations Committee.

The House is more diligent than the Senate. The Senate is “a mutual admiration society.” They are much more used to letting a fellow senator’s pet project go through than the House is; “They don’t do as good a job as the House.”

Regarding conference committees: A good deal of “horse trading.” You take it item by item and reach a compromise. Then he said, “the House is always at a disadvantage in conference. The Senate, if they really want a thing, can put in more than they need. Then the only compromise is a boost for the House.”

He complained about the fact that when he had one subcommittee assignment (83rd Congress, 1953-1955), “I felt I knew my field, but now [three subcommittees], I’m not so sure I know what’s going on in these areas because I just don’t have the time.” “I’m frank to say that I think the organization under John Taber [R-NY] was vastly superior than now.” He says that he and Rep. Melvin Laird (R-MI), also on the HEW subcommittee, would pair off, and one would go to the subcommittee at a time so as to free the other one, to go to some other subcommittee.

He complained about the Committee being “woefully understaffed.”