

Interview with Rep. Louis C. Wyman (R-NH)

April 1964

“The trouble with Appropriations is that one or two men are handling one or two billion dollar jobs. And the rest of them let him do it. Our [Independent Offices Sub] committee is completely dominated by Albert Thomas [D-TX]. John Fogarty [D-RI] completely dominates his [Labor, Health, Education and Welfare] subcommittee, and they tell me Jamie Whitten [D-MS] dominates agriculture. And the rest of the members sit back and say, ‘let them do it.’” I mentioned that he had said of the District of Columbia Subcommittee, “I let Bill Natcher [D-KY] handle that,” and he agreed that he doesn’t care much about that, that the amount of money is small compared with the space budget.

“If I ever get to be chairman of that subcommittee [Independent Offices], there will be the tightest requirements of proof and justification you ever saw. I’ll make them justify the programs they’ve already got, and not just the increases. Let’s say some small agency, like the FTC [Federal Trade Commission], comes in and wants thirteen million instead of twelve million and 43 new positions. I’ll say to them, ‘now this is just preliminary. But I see you want 43 new positions. You aren’t going to get the 43 positions. The Committee is unanimous on that, and that is settled. Now, the Committee wants you to justify the personnel you already have. We’re thinking of cutting you back 10 percent all across the board. Is there any reason why we shouldn’t? And if you have any difficulty in determining just what functions you’d like to cut out, you can just leave that to the Committee.’ Then you’d really see something. Of course, there’s where you might run into conflicts with the authorizing committee, and you’d have to watch yourself there.”

Why on the Committee? “Money is power.” He is concerned regarding the balanced budget, excessive expenditures, etc. He was with Sen. Styles Bridges (R-NH) and said that he came to know the “practicalities” of government. These practicalities pointed to the power of appropriations.

How did he get on? He explained at great length. He is a real self-starter and worked very hard at it. He was the counsel to the Taber-Sen. Pat McCarran (D-NV) committee on the Marshall Plan (Joint Committee on Foreign Economic Cooperation), but the point is that Taber knew him. Taber wrote to Rep. Ben F. Jensen (R-IA), the ranking minority member on Appropriations, on his behalf. And Wyman said this was most important. “I went around to the Committee on Committees and did it mathematically. Bob Taft [Rep. Robert Taft, Jr. (R-OH)] and I were friends in law school, and I nominated him for president of the Eighty-eight Club. I would have nominated him anyway, but that didn’t hurt me with Clarence Brown [R-OH]. There’s 20 votes. And Katherine St. George [R-NY] was safe most of the way. I went to see Jimmie Utt [R-CA]. He’s a real conservative, and so am I – though, not as conservative as he is. I went to [Minority Leader] Charlie Halleck [R-IN], and he said he couldn’t commit himself. And I talked with H.R. Gross [R-IA]. He’s important, and he knows Mr. Jensen. I spent two hours telling him my philosophy. Of course, I’ve written a great deal and been in public life, and people know where I stand. Then I went to see Ben Jensen. He said he couldn’t say

anything. I said I knew that, but that I wanted him to know who I was, and that I hoped he wouldn't axe me when my name came up. I knew that if I didn't have his approval, I wouldn't go on." Then Wyman said that the Republican committee decided to put one freshman on, and when they did that his qualifications were the best. He mentioned his age, that he was no "kid" like Donald Rumsfeld (R-IL). Perhaps the "Young Turk" movement in the Republican party had some effect in getting the Republican Committee to decide to put one freshman on, as they apparently did. Minority Whip Leslie Arends (R-IL) made that point to him about the decision of the Republican Committee.

He talked about the minority report that he wrote in 1963 on the space program. He said Independent Offices Subcommittee Chairman Thomas didn't try to stop him. "It's a right of every member to file a minority report.... I don't give a damn if they've got sixteen kinds of traditions against it...the report was not against the chairman's ideas anyway. It didn't bother him very much and he didn't try to stop me."

He's very conscious of his freshman status and that he cannot talk out too much. He says, "I don't know why Thomas lets me do it, but he does." "Sometimes I sit over there on the floor and grit my teeth. If I were an older member I would speak out, but I can't."

How on subcommittee? "John Rhodes [R-AZ] and I were classmates at Harvard Law School. We went to classes together for years. When he heard that I was coming down, he went off Independent Offices and onto Public Works. He wanted Public Works. He suggested to Mr. Jensen that I go on Independent Offices. And Jensen put me on."

"If I became ranking minority member, I should be scared to death, and I will be. I'd have to know my homework and really know my stuff. And I will, in another term or two." He talks about Rep. Charles Raper Jonas (R-NC) as being "no spring chicken." In connection with this idea he said how necessary it would be that he get out and see what is going on. He stressed travel, and it was at this point that he talked about Rep. Harold C. Ostertag (R-NY) not getting off his duff and going out to see what is going on.