

Floyd M. Riddick

Senate Parliamentarian, 1964-1974

Interview #5

Senate Leaders and Followers

(July 12, 1978; July 27, 1978; August 25, 1978)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie



Floyd Riddick (center) with Senators Howard Baker (left) and Robert Byrd (right), commemorating the new publication of *Senate Procedure* in 1981.

August 25, 1978

Ritchie: We've been talking about unlimited debate for quite some time now, and I wondered from a personal side what it was like for the parliamentarian to have to sit through that unlimited debate, particularly the filibusters.

Riddick: Well, I've had some interesting experiences in that regard. I remember in 1954, I didn't go to the desk until about 1951, my predecessor Mr. Watkins had a serious illness, and a major operation having part of one lung removed, and he was out for over nine months. In that period we got into a lot of filibusters. One was the so-called Power Act, which involved the Dixon-Yates contract. I remember that I was suddenly thrown to the wolves, so to speak, and we had one debate that ran eighty hours, which I had to stay with without any sleep or any time to go down and have meals. I'd

page 222

get a sandwich and go out near the desk and eat it, and stay there. Well, that was really a hardship on a single individual. At that stage of the game we had only the parliamentarian and myself as assistant parliamentarian. When Mr. Watkins was out I was left with the whole assignment.

We also had involved at that time the election contest between Senator [\[Dennis\] Chavez](#) and Mr. [Patrick] Hurley, who had been Secretary of War. That was very politically inclined, and it was pretty rough treatment I got at the very beginning; that was the first thing that confronted me when I had the desk to myself without Mr. Watkins' assistance. On another occasion, I think it was about 1957 when Senator [Lyndon Johnson](#) was still the majority leader, I remember coming into the Senate one Monday morning at 10:00 o'clock -- well, I

page 223

came in at 9:00 o'clock but the Senate came in at 10:00 o'clock -- and we didn't adjourn until Saturday night of that week at 12:00 midnight. However, Mr. Watkins was back then, and while he was in bad health, he took about six or eight hours of each day, each twenty-four hour day, while I rested. We came in Monday morning and we went out Saturday night. It was pretty rough treatment.

Ritchie: You must get very disoriented after a while, just sitting there through so much with so little break.

Riddick: I was still young then, so to speak, and I was able to endure it pretty well, as long as I'd keep drinking coffee and eating lightly. I was a little bit jittery and nervous, but when the pressure is really thrown on you I think your glands start pumping adrenalin sufficient to take care of you under such a crisis. Somehow, certainly until

page 224

I was about ready to retire, whenever I got in under severe pressure, my mind seemed to be able to recall everything that had ever gone on before, and I was able to function, I thought, reasonably calm and able to meet whatever crisis I was up against.

Ritchie: I always wondered if the senators, when they get involved in these lengthy debates realize the burdens that they're putting on their staff, this twenty-four hour around-the-clock ordeal.

Riddick: Yes, they frequently apologize, but that doesn't help too much. It keeps you from getting mad maybe, but as far as your feelings are concerned you get awfully tired regardless of the bouquets they might throw in your behalf.

Ritchie: Would someone like [Wayne Morse](#) or [Strom Thurmond](#), who were champion filibusterers, come to you in advance to talk about tactics about holding the floor and things like that?

Riddick: Unless they had previously done it, they would. They were always concerned

page 225

with their rights, and they would ask you under what conditions they could act. And not only that, most of these senators, when they go for a long speech, or participate in a filibuster, they keep somebody next to them all the time, and they're always able to pause long enough to whisper to that aide they've got next to them to undertake an assignment for them. It's not uncommon, even during the debate, when they're holding the floor for a long period of time, if they're in doubt of their rights, or in doubt of what they would like to undertake for fear they'd lose the floor, they'll send their aide up to the desk to ask us "what rights have I got?" "what can I do?" or what have you. We write it out, and he takes it back to the senator and puts it up on his desk, the senator reads it and he knows exactly where he stands. Sure we work together, because after all,

page 226

that's what we're there for, to help the senators and the presiding officer in any parliamentary crisis.

Ritchie: I guess they were entertaining in their way, a person like Morse or like Thurmond. I don't know what your reaction to them individually was; did they drive you crazy when they got into those long-winded speeches?

Riddick: Well, some people get mad, but I figured always that that was what I was hired for, to assist the Senate regardless how tired or otherwise I might feel. I always let the thought dominate my mind: "This is what you were hired for boy, sit still." And I never got bitter about it at all, under any circumstances. Further more, I find if you get mad your mind isn't clear when you're trying to serve the Senate.

I might tell you an interesting story, I remember when we had under debate the so-called Public Power,

page 227

Senator [\[Estes\] Kefauver](#) was participating in this. As you know, when senators start one of these filibusters they always map out who's going to speak and when he's going to speak, and how long he's going to speak. This particular evening, along about 4:00 o'clock, Senator Kefauver picked up the assignment to carry the Senate for most of the night, until he was relieved, whatever the schedule was.

Long about 9:00 or 10:00 o'clock in the evening, there weren't many on the floor, maybe two others, when his aide came up to the desk and said: "Doc, the Senator wants to know what he can do. He is equipped with a bag to take care of the situation, but something has happened to the bag and he's upset. He needs to go to the Men's Room to adjust himself." I said to the aide: Just tell him to ask unanimous consent that he be permitted to call for a quorum without losing his right to the floor,

page 228

and then he could go out and adjust himself and come back." It was really entertaining, knowing what the situation was, to see him try to walk off that floor!

Ritchie: In a related story, this wasn't a filibuster, but I heard that Wayne Morse liked to give speeches late at night, just before the Senate was about to adjourn, and that on one occasion when [Daniel Brewster](#) was in the Chair, Morse hesitated for a moment and Brewster, who had to leave, suddenly adjourned the Senate. And the next day had to apologize.

Riddick: That's not exactly the situation, there are two or three things that I would like to mention here. The first instance, you remember when Senator Morse changed his political party; he first became independent and then he became a Democrat. Well, after he'd been elected a Republican and shifted his party allegiance to independent, he lost his committee assignments. The only committee

page 228

assignment they would give him (he'd been on Armed Services and one or two other major committees) was D.C. This was before the current rules in which senators have to be given major assignments, they gave him two minor committees. He refused them; he said as a senator since he didn't have any committee assignments he had to hold his committee meetings on the Senate floor. And it was invariably on Friday evening when you wanted to get out for a long weekend! He would come in about 4:00 o'clock and hold you to 9:00 o'clock Friday night, and this was regularly done! So he did vex a lot of senators who had to sit there and preside, and it was getting tiresome, because generally speaking there would be not more than three on the floor: the presiding officer, one on the minority side, and Senator Morse.

This particular night you are thinking about, I tell this as

background to show you the animosity on the part of some senators because of the way he held the Senate in without what they thought was reason. This particular evening I had gone down to the Cosmos Club. Through all of the years that I'd served the Senate as parliamentarian I don't think that I had even been away from the Senate when it was in session more than three or four times, and this was one of the times. That evening I had been given assurance that there were going to be no other problems for the evening, and so I had my son's father-in-law as a guest and I was taking him to the Cosmos Club for dinner. While I was there all of a sudden I was called to the phone, and it was Senator Wayne Morse. He asked me: "Doc, can they do me this way?" I said: "Well, Senator, they've adjourned, I don't know how you can get them back in." But the thing occurred like

this: They had before I'd left gotten a unanimous consent agreement that at the close of business the Senate would adjourn or recess to a certain hour on Monday, this being I think a Friday night. What had happened was that Senator Morse had the floor, he'd been recognized, but he hadn't started his speech. He yielded to someone else to make some comments. He might have said a few words, but he hadn't said much. Well, somehow the other senator finished before Senator Morse had gotten his papers all straightened and he paused for a moment. Senator Brewster, presiding, knew that that order was that at the conclusion of the transaction of business the Senate would stand in adjournment or recess until Monday, which gave some sanction to the Chair, as they have done, to adjourn the Senate on their own, in a sense. But Senator Morse had been recognized and had only yielded and the floor hadn't been

taken away from him. But then Senator Brewster gaveled the order that pursuant to the previous order the Senate will stand adjourned until such-and-such a time. And this is when Senator Morse found himself standing there without finishing his speech, and that's when he came to the cloakroom and called me at the Cosmos Club, wanting to know if he had a right to continue. Well he, I think, put his speech in the *Record* without delivering it, and I think the *Record* so shows, but he did not get the floor back to make his speech that night. And I understand that the presiding officer, Mr. Brewster, was called in by the leadership the next day, or Monday, whichever it was, and forewarned that that was not the conduct of a senator. I question if it ever occurs again.

I remember Senator [\[John Marshall\] Butler](#) of Maryland, and Senator [\[George\] Aiken](#) one time,

page 233

had been put in the Chair under a comparable circumstance, and they had engagements and they wanted to be somewhere else. They were put in the Chair with the understanding that they would be relieved, but they couldn't find a senator to relieve them. And they would threaten: "If you don't get me somebody in ten minutes I'm going to get up and walk out of here!" As a sort of a joke for a long time comments between Senator Butler and myself went: "If you don't get me somebody I'm going to go out of here!"

Ritchie: I'd like to ask you now about the leadership that you served under during your service as parliamentarian, some of the personalities that you've been in contact with.

Riddick: I think we've had some very strong and important senators during my term. I might mention just two or three on this occasion. I was very much impressed by the senior Senator [\[Robert\] Taft](#), by Senator [Carl Hayden](#), by

page 234

Senator [Walter George](#) of Georgia,, and Senator [\[Arthur\] Vandenberg](#) of Michigan. There were others, [Millikin](#) of Colorado, [Douglas](#) of Illinois, these were very informed men; they worked hard at their assignments, and I was very much impressed by them. I didn't always, agree with all of their points of view, but I never raise a question about the beliefs and philosophy of another person. I would hate to be restricted in my philosophy of life and therefore I must yield the same to others.

I'd like to tell a little story on one or two of these men. You know that it got to the point that senior Senator Taft of Ohio became "Mr. Republican." He had brought to the Senate a man named George H.E. Smith, who had been professor in the graduate school at Yale. We wrote a little book together called *Congress in Action*, and we became very close friends. George Smith was brought down to

page 235

Washington by Senator Taft to be the staff director of the Republican Policy Committee, but my association with him was as an individual not as a party man. One day I asked George, I said: "George, I am impressed by Senator Taft, and he

has certainly gained a national reputation as 'Mr. Republican.' What would you say brought him to the forefront as the leading Republican senator in the Senate?" And George said: "If I had to answer it in a few words I'd say: 'Let Bob do it.'" I said: "What do you mean?" He explained that Senator Taft was on the Policy Committee for the Republicans and was one of the group that helped to manage the Republican leadership in the Senate. George, as the staff director of the Policy Committee sat in all of these meetings that the Republican senators held, that is the members of the Policy Committee, and heard all of the

page 236

discussions, and arguments pro and con, and the procedure.

He said that it developed in the Policy Committee that frequently they would decide who was going to take the lead on such-and-such a bill that was going to come before the Senate, who was going to spur the Republican members into debating and fighting the issue, or supporting the issue, and who was going to see that all of the data and information were pulled together for presenting the Republican point of view. And it was not uncommon for them at these meetings to say we've got to take a stand on say the F.D.I.C. [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation], what stand are we going to take and who's going to prepare the Republican point of view on this issue? At that particular time I believe Senator Millikin was chairman of the Policy Committee and he would go around the table and ask each senator: "Would you be

page 237

willing to undertake this assignment?" Each time all the senators would have an excuse: "I've got this to do," "I can't do that because I'm otherwise occupied on this which is more important to me." And after they'd go around the table, finally Senator Taft, who was then somewhat new in the Senate, would say: "Well, if nobody else will undertake it, I'll undertake it." This procedure developed into a repeat on nearly every issue, until they finally developed the saying: "Let Bob do it!" And it got to the point that Bob did nearly all of it. So naturally he became the important senator on the Republican side, or the one who was doing the job, until he was the real leader, regardless of what his title was.

Ritchie: He was only leader in name for a few months.

Riddick: A very short period of time before he had that cancer attack. That's George's concept of "Let Bob do it," as to how

he came to the front and became "Mr. Republican."

Ritchie: That's a little similar to Senator [Robert Byrd](#)'s rise as Democratic leader.

Riddick: That's exactly right, he undertook and did everything to the point that he couldn't be turned down in his bid for the leadership. Another story that I think is most interesting; Senator Carl Hayden told me this story. I remember when I first came up to the Senate to work I had interviewed him, because he was the head man here for all practical purposes -- he was also the chairman of the Joint Committee on Printing, and when I came up to set up the "Daily Digest" in the back of the Congressional Record, I was sent over to interview Senator Hayden. I hadn't talked with him for more than three minutes before he picked up the phone and called the Bureau of the Budget and told them that he was going to send me down to figure

out the estimated costs of running the Digest. Well, he impressed me so by his action that I wanted to ask him a few questions.

I had read the *Record* for many years and I always noticed that you never found that Carl Hayden said more than a paragraph or so in the *Record* on any bill. He'd get up and make a brief statement and that was it. I said: "Senator, I have heard since I've been around here that you are without doubt one of the most influential members of the Senate. That whatever you say they do. And I never see where you debate much. Why is it you never have much to say?" He said: "Well, let me tell you young man, when I first came to the House of Representatives the leader for the Democrats was [John Sharp Williams](#) from Mississippi, during the Woodrow Wilson administration. I had always been interested in the interstate highways system and had spent much time in that field and felt that I knew that subject

pretty well," (and as you know, he is considered the father of the federal aid to highway systems). He said: "I was in the House on this occasion and we were debating this highway bill. I went down into the well of the House that day and spoke for nearly an hour on this bill, setting forth my philosophy in every detail, and how I thought this highway bill should be developed and enacted. After I

finished I walked back down to the leader's desk, (you know, they have tables in the House Chamber for the leaders to sit) and I turned to John Sharp Williams and said: 'Mr. Leader, how did that sound?'" He said John Sharp Williams twisted his long handlebar mustache a little it and turned to him and said: "Young man, it sounded good. But it's on the *Record* now and it's hard to change after you put it on the *Record*." He said: "That taught me a lesson, and it leaves me more maneuverability to say little and get things done." That impressed me very much.

page 241

Then, the next story that I'd like to tell you involves Senator Walter George of Georgia. I remember one day, and I was very impressed by his ability to speak and convince the Senate. As a matter of fact the Senate was debating the moratorium treaty with Germany and we at the desk were discussing the issue when the debate began and didn't believe they'd get much more than a majority vote. At that time, I believe Senator George of Georgia was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and he took the floor; [Nixon](#) was then vice president; and Senator George spoke for about forty-five minutes without a note, as he normally spoke without notes. During his speech there was total silence in the chamber, and we noticed senators coming in two and three at a time until there were nearly ninety senators on the floor. He held forth for about I

page 242

would say forty minutes, and during that speech the vice president, Mr. Nixon, reached over and said: "There goes one of the last men that when he speaks he changes the points of view of senators." Well, to our amazement, they took the roll and I believe the vote was something like 90 to 2. It was just unbelievable how he convinced the senators they should support that treaty.

On another occasion (Carl Marcy was the staff director of the Foreign Relations Committee at that time) the Senate was considering a reciprocal tax treaty with Canada. As you know, the practice is for someone, some staff director or some aide, to sit next to the chairman of the committee to supply him with data and with details that he might forget while he's speaking. Well, on this particular occasion, Senator George took the floor on this reciprocal tax agreement, and I noticed

Carl Marcy in the back of the chamber instead of sitting next to Senator George. Nobody was sitting next to Senator George to assist him, but he was standing again without notes speaking. I walked around to the back of the chamber and encountered Carl Marcy and I said: "Carl why aren't you down there next to Senator George, assisting him?" He said: "Hell, he knows more about the treaty than I do, why should I be there?" And that was the attitude that those who worked closely with Senator George had towards the senator. He was very competent and made very brilliant speeches on the floor, and was considered one of the most informed senators.

I might say the same thing about Senator Vandenberg. As you know, Senator Vandenberg had been a newspaperman, and I was told a number of times by reporters that when he was

chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee he normally held a press conference after the meeting was over (in those days they held closed meetings nearly all together and the chairman would hold a press conference after the meeting). I was told by a number of newspaper men that if the reporters had been able to take shorthand, they would have had a much better story, if they had taken down exactly what Vandenberg said, than if they wrote the story as they saw fit, because he had a knack for taking a particular case history and organizing it to present it very succinctly and convincingly. He was a very forceful speaker, too. I remember after the 80th Congress when the Democrats took over, I'll never forget the speech he made one day. In the 80th Congress, under his leadership, he had allowed a very close party ratio on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Then when the Democrats took over, the Democratic caucus decided to reduce that ratio so that the Democrats would have a bigger ratio of the total membership, I think it was by two or more. This hurt Vandenberg's pride. He made one of the hottest speeches on that issue that you can imagine. He felt he had been humiliated because he had been willing to work with a one-majority during his leadership of the Foreign Relations Committee and he didn't think it was quite fair to shift it. But, as you know, the question always arises in making these ratios because if some major issues are going to come up in that committee during that Congress they like to be sure that they will have a majority supporting

the majority party to get legislation out of it. That seemed to be why this was done, because they were anticipating some major legislation, and the Democrats

page 246

wanted a sufficient ratio on the committee so they'd be sure if they had one Democrat to deviate they'd still have enough to get a bill out of the committee. But this really upset Senator Vandenberg and he made one very forceful speech, and became so heated that he had to keep wiping around his neck with a big handkerchief; he was perspiring so.

Ritchie: Did they roll-back the ratio?

Riddick: No, he lost. They stuck to it. I don't say it was partisan, I'm just saying there was a difference of opinion between the two groups.

Ritchie: We were talking about the type of leader who stays in the forefront, as opposed to those like Hayden, who stayed in the background a bit, [Richard Russell](#) also seems to fit that category, as chief of the "Inner Club" for at least his latter years in the Senate yet never became the leader of his party, at least the formal leader.

page 247

Riddick: Well, I'm informed that Senator Russell absolutely was offered the assignment to be the majority leader, after [\[Ernest\] McFarland](#). Senator McFarland had been defeated, he was from Arizona and he'd had to take stands to support his party and the President and some of these stands he took were very distasteful to the voters of Arizona and he was defeated; just like Senator [Lucas](#) of Illinois had been defeated. Of course, I understand there were several reasons why Senator Lucas had been defeated, one of which was because Senator [Kefauver](#) had gone back into Illinois and made a speech that reflected on the senator, and at that time Senator Estes Kefauver was a very popular figure in the United States.

Anyhow, I am also informed in the inner circles that there was no question that Senator Russell could have had the leadership after

page 248

McFarland; he would have been elected leader of the Democratic Party without question, had he been willing to accept. But he refused to take it because he said

that the civil rights issue was going to come up and he could not take a stand in keeping with what was then popular on the civil rights issues; and since he had to represent his state he didn't feel he could take the majority leadership under the circumstance. He denied the post but recommended that Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas be the one to take the post, and Senator Lyndon Johnson at his beckoning was made the majority leader and therefore became sufficiently popular nationally to get himself eventually elected President of the United States. I knew this relationship rather closely and personally because I was tied in with it a number of times. I know that on nearly all of the parliamentary issues, as long

page 249

as Senator Johnson was the majority leader, Johnson very seldom took any action, if it were significant, before he consulted Senator Russell to see how he felt about the issue.

Senator Russell told me the story that after Johnson had gone down to the White House, after the death of President [Kennedy](#), that President Johnson called him to come down to the White House one day. He told me that when he went down he kept saying "Mr. President," and Lyndon Johnson said: "Call me Lyndon as you used to, after all we've been together all these years." He said: "No, Mr. President. Now you're the President of the United States. You to me are Mr. President." And he refused to address him otherwise for the rest of his life. Anyhow, he was called down to the White House by the President to ask him if he would serve on the Warren Commission to investigate Kennedy's assassination,

page 250

which the President had to appoint. He said, I told him: "Oh no, Mr. President, please don't give me that. I've got more than I can do now and I just would rather not get into that." But he said the President said: "I'm sorry, Dick, I've already given your name to the press."

Ritchie: Talking about Johnson, I've heard that he helped to change quite a bit of the flow of the business in the Senate, that he was quite a forceful leader and that the procedures and the daily routine began to change as he was leader. In particular I've heard that he made use of unanimous consent to a degree that had never been done before, and also the way he would logjam legislation up and pass it in a rush. Could you comment on these observations?

Riddick: I'd always heard that the only way to transact business in the Senate was under unanimous consent. I'm not sure that you would say that he reduced the Senate to unanimous consent procedure,

page 251

as opposed to the previous experiences of the Senate. What he did make popular was the use of unanimous consent agreements. Now if you go back to the Record of earlier years you'll find that they reached a lot of agreements towards the latter part of a session; the sessions weren't so long, and they would reach agreements as to how long they were going to debate various bills. Certainly in modern times Johnson at least reinstated or increased the use of unanimous consent agreements as opposed to doing things by unanimous consent. In other words, you might reach a unanimous consent that you were going to vote at 5:00 o'clock tomorrow on the passage of a bill, but you didn't work out all the details. What Mr. Johnson did was introduce the use of what we call unanimous consent agreements, a detailed agreement as to how you were going to consider or the procedure that you were going to use for the

page 252

consideration of a specific bill; how long each amendment would be debated; how long the general debate of the bill would last; whether all amendments were to be germane to the bill; and details of that nature. This was all reduced to unanimous consent agreements, even specifying the time that you'd proceed to the consideration of a said bill.

Yes, Mr. Johnson in that regard introduced a new procedure in the Senate, or at least expanded it, or made it more common than it had ever been before in modern times. It was almost to the point that hardly any major bill was considered without eventually reaching a general unanimous consent agreement to the final disposition of that bill. Unlike in the last ten or fifteen years, generally speaking you would start on the bill without an agreement, debate it a day or two days, and then get an agreement. You would get an

page 253

agreement on some before you even started debate. Still when Mr. Johnson came to the forefront it was sort of a practice to allow them to consider the bill a little to see if they did anticipate a long debate, and if they did they would try to shorten the debate by restricting the time on each amendment. These were hard to come by, of course, and when Mr. Johnson started this procedure it was a common

practice for him to consult us (Parliamentarians) before hand and we would write up the agreement so it would be sufficiently drafted to meet any contingency that he had anticipated, parliamentary-wise, so that he could accomplish his end. Then he would have that agreement read to the Senate as opposed to just getting up and verbally stating it as the present majority leader, Mr. Byrd, is able to do. After it was read then the question was submitted: "Is there objection to this

page254

agreement?" It really, before the end of his leadership, was almost a common practice to get an agreement on every major bill, before you finally disposed of that bill.

He obviously was a great leader. He became one of the strongest leaders I guess we'd had up until that time. Whether we'll have some stronger later I don't know. I'd heard various senators comment that he was a little bit too coercive at times, and too strong to their individual satisfaction. But it's rather difficult, if you become a strong leader, for an individual member who might not like the way things are going to buck it, because if the leader gets in the harness and gets strong enough he can prohibit you from getting any favors or prohibit you from getting any legislation that you might want considered, or even prohibit any of your amendments from getting agreed to. So sometimes when the leader

page 255

gets too strong the individuals lose their effectiveness. So there are arguments on both sides and therefore some of the senators did complain, but there's no question about it but that Mr. Johnson was very forceful and was able to get legislation enacted which no other leader theretofore had been able to accomplish.

Ritchie: I've heard that he also increased the hours of the Senate, that when he was there he would work late into the evening, and Saturday sessions and things like that.

Riddick: Oh, I remember periods when you were trying to get ready to adjourn that more than once you'd go anywhere from a month to ten weeks meeting every day from ten in the morning till ten at night, and including Saturdays, with a few exceptions. They were long hours. He was a driver if I'd ever known one. I remember one day he came in and told me he wanted me to draft him an agreement right

quick and told me what he wanted. I said: "All right senator, I'll get it for you as soon as I can." Well it wasn't five minutes before he came back into my office and said: "Where's my agreement?" I said: "Well, senator, I've dictated it and the secretary (who is now the parliamentarian, he was with us as secretary while he was studying law at night) will have it ready as soon as he can type it. He went back out and it didn't seem to me it was over a minute before he was back in again and said: "Where's that damn agreement?" He gave Murray Zweben hell for not having it ready. He said: "I could have gone all the way back over to my office in the Senate Office Building and had it dictated and typed out and been back with it by this time" He was a driver, and I don't mean maybe. Whenever he asked you for something he wanted it five minutes before he asked you. He was that type of a person.

That reminds me of a story you'd be interested in hearing, I think it was after the election of '58, when there was a landslide of Democrats coming into Washington, many from the West. The story goes, and I think it's true -- I told him this one time and it tickled him -- that several of the Democratic senators from the West came into Washington in early December to find homes to be ready for the January session. Senator Johnson always kept tab on everybody. He had his staff keep tab on every senator-elect and what they expected and etc., all the information he could get on them. Well, as soon as they got into town he knew they were here, and he began to call meetings to discuss what he expected to do that session and what they were willing to do, to get an understanding of what they wanted. This went on for day after day after day, and the new senators couldn't get a chance to

locate an apartment or home to live in. After one of these meetings that he'd held one morning they were standing around talking together with several others, one or two of the old-timers, and one of the youngsters said to the old-timers: "What does Johnson mean? Why does he hold these meetings? Does he work this way all the time? Doesn't he realize that Rome wasn't built in a day?" And one of the old-timers popped up and said: "Yes, but Johnson wasn't the foreman of that job!"

Mr. Johnson was able to work with the minority leader. He and Senator Dirksen got along beautifully together. But they were always trying to compete with each

other. I heard another little story about them that shows you the typical Johnson as well as the competition. One evening, the story goes, Senator Lyndon Johnson had pulled out and was starting downtown in his car with his chauffeur.

page 259

Senator Dirksen happened to pull by him and saw Senator Johnson using a telephone in the car, it was a new gadget at that time. Senator Dirksen was very much impressed, so the next day he called the Sergeant-at-Arms and said: "I was riding down the street last night and encountered Johnson and he has a telephone in his car. I'd like to get one in my car right away." So the Sergeant-at-Arms had it put in his car and then Senator Dirksen sat in wait to see Senator Johnson go out. The first evening this was convenient he had his chauffeur to pull up beside Johnson and he dialed and called Johnson on the phone, and said: "Lyndon, isn't this a great idea to have these phones in the car so we can talk this way." Lyndon said: "Yes, but excuse me Ev, I've got to answer the other phone!"

page 260

July 12, 1978

Ritchie: You said earlier that Everett Dirksen was already famous while still in the House?

Riddick: Yes, he had gained considerable recognition in the House, and he had a great knack of speaking. As you know, the maximum limit that a member of the House can speak is one hour. He was able to get up in the well of the House and make his speech and close his speech right on time. Now, I became a very good friend of Senator Dirksen's. *Time* magazine's editor, Ray Leslie Buel, once interviewed me and asked, if he wanted to write a story on a typical or best Congressman, whom would I recommend that he take under consideration. I told him immediately Everett Dirksen, and there appeared in *Fortune* magazine of April 1943 a feature article on him. That was, I guess, one of the first, and certainly the biggest spread that he had up to that time in the national limelight.

page 261

Ritchie: What was it that appealed to you most about Dirksen?

Riddick: Well, he was a good speaker and a good story teller, and he always wove his stories into his speech so that it would make the speech very effective. I remember on the Senate floor, when they were trying to eliminate or curtail the

number of reports and regulations required by the various agencies of the government, he came in to make a speech to have these requirements eliminated or reduced. And what did he come in with? He came in with a hollerith sheet that looked like a tape off of a computer; it was a huge stack of papers, and he would keep unraveling it and throwing it out on the floor and saying: "Now, listen to this one!" He'd read that regulation and make his comments and then speed along down further and he'd repeat it again. And boy, he had everybody in the Senate chamber spellbound!

page 262

July 27, 1978

Ritchie: I'd also like to ask you about some of the old-time Senate characters, particularly people like Jim Preston and Guy Ives, with whom you said you were familiar.

Riddick: Well, they were certainly old-timers. I don't know exactly when Guy Ives came here, but Jim Preston told me he came up here in about 1887. He was for a long time the superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery, and had attended, he told me, all of the national conventions from his first arrival here around 1890 until about 1952.

Now, some of the things I'm going to mention to you require that I mention both of their names, because I don't remember which one of them related the stories to me; like for example I want to tell you a story on Senator [Boies Penrose](#). I don't know which one told me this story, whether it was Jim Preston or Guy Ives.

Those

page 263

men did have great backgrounds, and I think that my concept of the Senate as a growing institution was greatly developed by the stories that they told me. I might say first, about Jim Preston, I got to know him around '48 to '53, when I associated regularly with him. I became a rather close friend of his. He had a major surgical operation and while he was recovering he needed somebody to join him for luncheons. I began to go with him for lunch every day, and it developed into Jim telling me about his experiences and impressions.

He promised me, in this association, that when he no longer needed his notes and papers, which he had collected through the years, he would turn them over to me -- he was remarkable in that regard -- his memory was great, he had a photographic mind, and he had a newspaper nose. He had clipped and saved all newspaper and

magazine stories that were of any significance, throughout his entire career. He knew darn near every politician in America, from county sheriff up.

He told me that when he no longer needed all of these papers, he was going to turn them over to me for use. Well, as he got older, in his last years, he didn't seem to remember it, or he got so mean, the last time I asked him he told me: "Why, I burned them all!" So instead of turning them over to me as he had promised, he had actually set them afire and just burned them to get rid of them. This is certainly in support of the work that you're trying to accomplish here to get what factual history you can that has not been written down before it is too late.

One of the stories that he told me would be of interest to you. He told me the story of Samuel Clemens. He said that "Mark Twain," when he was writing his book on *Innocents*

Abroad, had a little one room -- I don't guess you could call it an apartment -- but just a room, down on F Street. He was put on the Senate payroll by a senator from Nevada, and kept there because he didn't have any money to finance such an undertaking. The senator had faith in his ability to write, and he put him on the payroll solely to help him continue his writing. He told me that Mark Twain, whom he knew pretty well, was a most peculiar individual. He remembered -- to cite his peculiarity -- one day when they were holding hearings on a copyright bill. It was in December, I believe he said. There was snow on the ground, and Mark Twain came up here as a witness before the committee, in a white summer suit, just to get attention -- to act peculiarly so people would notice and pay attention to him.

Ritchie: You said that Preston had known Twain personally. I guess it was the connection through the Press Gallery.

Riddick: Oh yes, that's correct. I think I mentioned that he was the superintendent of the Press Gallery for quite a while. Because of his background, and knowledge of the peculiarities of the Senate, he was sent out to Hollywood -- or Hollywood got him to come out -- when they were making the picture on "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." He went out there and became frustrated since they

wouldn't follow an accurate portrayal of Senate operations. He got mad and left; he wouldn't stay with them until it was finished.

He told me a lot of interesting stories. I wish I had all of his notes on them, because they do help to fill in gaps of Senate history. For example, he told me that when Woodrow Wilson was fighting for the Versailles Treaty, that after he had gone out west to campaign for the treaty and had his semi-stroke -- or whatever the situation

page 267

was, he was going to meet with the Senate in closed session one day. He came up to the Senate and went to the elevator next to the Secretary's office, to go up to the second floor to the chamber. Since he did not have control of all of his muscles, they were assisting the President along. They brought into the elevator a chair, which was Boies Penrose's. It was a specially made chair, because Boies Penrose was a very big person. They put him down into the chair to ride up, and President Wilson said: "Well that's a mighty big chair. Whose is that?" They said: "Boies Penrose." He said: "I'll be damned if I sit in that chair!" And he jumped right up! I doubt if that's ever been put in the history books, but these fellows were there and saw it.

I think Guy Ives told me this story about Boies Penrose. He said Boies Penrose was a very

page 268

unique person and a very powerful man. He told me that it was felt by many that Boies Penrose was responsible for having nominated at least three presidents of the United States. Being a powerful senator from Pennsylvania, he made people come to him, and he just didn't make himself available to everybody under all circumstances. As a matter of fact, I knew one of his secretaries, who was up here later after I came to the Capitol, who used to tell me a lot of things about him.

Jim Preston or Guy Ives told me an interesting story, which I will relate here because I'm going to try to move into some of the changes in the Senate, as Jim Preston tried to indicate to me. Boies Penrose came to the elevator one morning to go up to the Senate chamber, and as he walked into the elevator, the elevator boy said: "Good morning, senator." And the senator curtly

page 269

replied: "I don't speak to hired help." That cut off that conversation! Well, the boy apparently forgot, and a few days later Penrose came in again, and he spoke to

the senator again: "Good morning, senator." He said: "I told you once, I didn't speak to hired help!" And in less than an hour the boy was off the payroll.

The reason for telling you this is that Jim Preston told me that the Senate had certainly changed from the time he came here until the time that we were conversing. He said that the Senate was really a club in the true sense; that the senators did not make themselves available, or talk freely to just everybody. They sort of had the concept that they were only responsible to God and their state legislatures.

A reporter would not dare go to talk to a senator on his journey from his office to the Senate chamber.

page 270

They wouldn't consider telling a reporter how they planned to vote on a certain bill, or talk to him about the details of the bill. They were just not as available to the public or to individuals as senators are today.

He told me the way the Press Gallery was operated at that time, was that if a senator decided, say for example Senator [\[Henry Cabot\] Lodge, Sr.](#), of Massachusetts wanted to talk to the press, he'd call the Press Gallery and tell the superintendent that he proposed to hold a press conference at 2:00 o'clock tomorrow, and anybody who was interested could come over. Then the superintendent of the Press Gallery would trek with the interested members of the press over to the office to the press conference. It was the same about going down to the White House. They didn't have the press staffs always available

page 271

right then and there to listen for every word that was being uttered on the floor, or trying to get conferences with senators when they were not on the floor or in their offices.

The senators were very reserved. They just didn't make themselves free for conversation under all circumstances. As a matter of fact, when I first came here, when I first started working at the desk, Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg of Michigan was President Pro Tem -- Truman had gone down to the White House following the death of Roosevelt.

Senator Vandenberg did not carry on conversation with me at the desk as to the procedures and the general legislative picture as I have experienced in later years. Today the presiding officers regularly talk about anything they want to inform themselves about. But that was not the case with

Senator Vandenberg. If he wanted something, he would ask you. He would lean over and whisper: "Could I ask you a question?" Then he'd ask the question, and as soon as he'd gotten to the point where he knew what he wanted to know, he'd cut you right off. That was the end of it. It was the same thing with the Senior Senator [Robert] Taft of Ohio. I met him many a time, and if he were not preoccupied he'd speak to you, but if he were preoccupied he'd pass you by, and wouldn't even speak, even though you might have said: "Good morning, senator." He'd just keep going, because he was preoccupied with what he was doing.

But the atmosphere, the attitude of the senators, has grown greatly different from what it was when I first came here, and certainly, from what Preston told me; it's greatly or entirely a different body.

Ritchie: Do you still sense an imperious nature in some of the senators now? Or is it pretty much a thing of the past?

Riddick: Some of them are more reserved than others. I remember for example, another illustration of the lack of availability of senators, when I first started working as assistant parliamentarian. One of the liaison officers, who was a colonel in the Army, came into the office one morning and said: "Could you get a word to Senator [Richard] Russell of Georgia for me?" He added: "We're having war games down in Louisiana next week and we'd like for the senator, as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, to come down to Louisiana and observe some of these games." Well I said: "Can't you go to his office and see him?" He said: "I've tried, but I can't get to him!" This was true. Now in the latter years of Senator Russell, the last two or

three, when he got to the point where he couldn't work and study as he had previously done, he was more available. But when I first came here he just didn't engage in small talk at all. It was strictly business all the way.

Ritchie: Was there really an Inner Club of senators like Russell?

Riddick: Oh, I think so. I think if you read [William S.] White's book on *The Citadel* he portrays that very strongly in one chapter, the Senate as a club. But anyhow, there's been a terrific change. Of course, obviously, the shift from the

state legislatures selecting the senators to popular elections, I think no doubt had a great deal to do with that. My predecessor used to tell me, and I'm quoting him and not my attitude, that the greatest mistake ever made in American government was when they changed the election of senators from that by the state legislatures to popular election.

page 275

He used to say that the senators previous to that were much greater scholars and students than they are today; that they're now politicians. His experience, and he came up here about 1904, was that most senators could quote Latin phrases without notes; they were real scholars, and they spoke mostly without notes. This situation has changed today considerably.

Ritchie: Do you think that Preston was also disappointed in the quality of more recent senators as opposed to the ones he earlier dealt with?

Riddick: I don't think there's any question about it. He used to make that comment. But, you know, that is sort of natural. I think a person who lives in one era has a tendency to be critical of changes. It's rather difficult to readjust to new concepts of life. I think you naturally expect older men who have lived in one world not to appreciate and give full credit to what is being done in the new world.

page 276

Ritchie: When you mentioned the inaccessibility of the senators in an earlier period, it's interesting that they met in executive session quite frequently, for all nominations and treaties. They actually closed the doors.

Riddick: Oh yes! I think that's a part of the nature of the Senate then as contrasted to today. Sometimes I'm inclined to think that the country might even be better off if they did it again. Until 1929, unless the Senate actually voted to open up an executive session (and an executive session meant the Senate was then considering either nominations or treaties), every door was closed and supposedly everything transacted accordingly was closed. In 1929, the rule was changed and everything was done openly unless they voted to go into closed session either on executive business or legislation. I think in recent years nearly everyone would say that the committees

would go into executive session. Going into executive session doesn't necessarily mean closed; it did gain the concept of being closed because executive sessions of the Senate were closed, as provided for under the rules before 1929.

Ritchie: They kept two sets of books, an executive journal and a legislative journal; they had an executive clerk and a legislative clerk,

Riddick: That's correct; and when they went into executive session the executive clerk would come in and sit in the closed session. The parliamentarian, of course, stayed in both executive session and the legislative session.

Ritchie: It seems like after World War II the practice of holding executive sessions really began to decline. I think in the whole 1960's there wasn't a single executive session. But now in the last five years they must have had five or six executive sessions. The whole thing has been revived all over again.

Riddick: Yes, but we don't refer to them any longer as executive sessions, we refer to them as closed sessions. Rule 35 provides for closed sessions, but executive sessions for consideration of nominations and treaties up until 1929 were closed, and that's when the rules were amended so that they would be opened unless they voted to have them closed. It was during that period, when the executive sessions were closed, that they used to refer to them as "executive sessions of committees," when they had the old mark-ups (of course, that rule has been changed now, too; since the so called "Sunshine" rule proposed by Senator [\[Lawton\] Chiles](#) was adopted.) Most of the mark-up sessions were all closed, and the same was true with the conference committees. But the "Sunshine" rule provides that they all have to be open, whether it's hearings or mark-up sessions, unless for one of the eight specified reasons

they are permitted to vote to go into closed session -- unless it is done in accordance with one of those provisions set forth in the "Sunshine" rule.

Ritchie: One of the problems the Senate had with their executive sessions was that reporters were always finding out exactly what went on inside.

Riddick: That's one of the reasons they threw them open, the reason they amended the rule. The vote on a nomination in an executive session would appear in complete detail in the next day's *New York Times*, or somewhere.

Ritchie: I suppose that caught someone like Preston in between, because he was trying to serve the Senate, but on the other hand he had to keep all those reporters happy.

Riddick: Keep them satisfied, yes. How it got out of the closed session, I don't know. Somebody had to tell it.

Ritchie: It was a persistent problem all through the 19th and early 20th centuries. A

page 280

lot of them must have been relieved that they didn't have to worry about keeping it closed after 1929.

Riddick: That's another case where the precedents changed greatly. What we've done was to establish that the rule providing penalties for breaking secrecy and so forth for the old executive sessions is now applicable to closed sessions. So what was done by the rulings of the Chair and precedents with regard to security matters was transferred to the closed sessions as well. They don't apply anymore to executive sessions unless they're closed. The Senate has just transferred all the secrecy and penalties provisions in the rules against senators and employees to the closed session rule.

Ritchie: Have there been many cases, since you've been connected with the Senate, of people being held in contempt for releasing information?

page 281

Riddick: No, it's sort of died out. You remember the case of Senator [\[Mike\] Gravel](#), when he read the confidential report from the Pentagon. There was some talk of censuring him, and I was consulted by both sides on the matter as to what could, should, and so forth, be done. But it never came to fruition; they just never acted on it.

Ritchie: Could they, if they had wanted to, censured him, or cited him for contempt for what he had done? Would the precedents and the rules have supported that?

Riddick: Well, they censured Senator [\[Hiram\] Bingham](#) of Connecticut for a much less thing than that. He was on the Finance Committee and when they were working out one of the tariff bills, one of his employees who attended these closed sessions was feeding the information out to

page 282

corporations secretly. He was censured because he had allowed this employee in there who was revealing this information. So they have censured senators for things not as bad as a senator himself divulging secret information.

[end of interview #5]

page 283
