

Donnald K. Anderson

The Democratic Cloakroom

Recollections of the Democratic Cloakroom.

Interview recorded January 25, 2006

But they were fascinating and they still are places where, you know, they're very small and compact, and the Members would kind of stand there shoulder to shoulder and talk about things that were very important, cut their deals, and make their agreements and discuss things rather candidly. Because the cloakrooms are really their private space. And, you know, if you were the soul of discretion you could kind of stand nearby and pick up on a lot of things and, you know, as long as you didn't run your mouth about what you heard, you were kind of taken for granted. I remember when Mr. O'Neill was the Speaker I used to see him often come in by himself, when there wasn't anybody at the snack bar, and get a cup of coffee or something, and then lean way over the counter and it looked like he and Raymond who ran the snack bar were whispering in each other's ears, and I often thought what are Raymond and the Speaker talking about? It's so mouth to ear, so clandestine looking. And I finally couldn't stand it anymore. And I one day said, "Ray what do you and the Speaker talk about so confidentially? Not that it's any of my business and I'm sure you'll tell me if it's not. But I see you kind of shushing together all the time." He says, "Are you kidding?" And I said, "Well, no I'm kind of curious." And he said, "We're talking about sports." He said, "We're both big fans, you know, he follows the same teams and games that I do. And so that's what we're talking about." Occasionally it might involve a little wager. Oh, okay. I thought isn't this great, you know. The Speaker, you know, always looking to Ray as his source of turf information as to what's going on in the world of sports because Ray really knew his teams and the various competitions and rankings. And the Speaker loved that. He was an avid sports fan.