

Joe Bartlett

Patronage in the U.S. House

Background on House patronage and appointments during the 1940s and 1950s.

Interview recorded April 7, 2006

BARTLETT:

Well, at the end of the 30 days it was coming to Labor Day, and it was a weekend, and they were taking the weekend off. And as I went back, I just went to say goodbye to the people who had been kind to me. I went to South Trimble, who was the Clerk of the House, and thanked him. He was a fine old grandfatherly gentleman. And he said... Well, we talked a minute. He said, "Now, you stick around." Well, now, what does stick around mean? That doesn't put you on the payroll or anything. Stick around. Well... "All right, sir." And then I went down to say goodbye to Joe Sinnott, who was the Doorkeeper of the House, who had charge of the Pages. And he was a man very much feared on Capitol Hill. He was as gruff old curmudgeon as you could get. I liked him! So we hit it off. And after a short conversation he used exactly the same words that South Trimble said, "Stick around." Again, that doesn't mean much. Well, I went home for the weekend, and used what they had told me as a sufficient reason to come back after Labor Day. And for the next three years I was not anybody—anybody's patronage.

JOHNSON:

That's interesting.

BARTLETT:

I assume that Joe Sinnott, with the collaboration of South Trimble, for as long as he lived, and then with their successors, saw to it that wherever there was an empty spot on the payroll, they'd put Bartlett on. And I had different pay different months. I can remember several of the Members whose payroll I was on who didn't know that I was on it. They just... And then I was a hustler. I was a farm boy. I didn't know what it was not to work and to work hard and work long... Dad's only advice was, "Get there earlier, and stay later, and do more than is expected of you." Well, that's pretty good advice. It wasn't hard for me. That was sort of my nature. But they did—I was used as Page Overseer, which is nothing more than the senior Page, a senior Page, or someone they designate. And those were interesting years.