

Irving Swanson

House Reading Clerk

Recollection of being offered the position of House Reading Clerk by Speaker Sam Rayburn.

Interview recorded July 27, 2004

So, he [Speaker Sam Rayburn] came in and Lew [Lewis] Deschler was the Parliamentarian at that time and Lew was sitting in there too. And he says...Sam was kind of a gruff man but a good and great man. He said, "Your résumé looks good, you're a lawyer." He said, "You've got to have a good voice to take us through these roll calls." And I said, well, I had done well in singing and I said I was on a debate team, that sort of thing. And so, in effect, he said, "I'll tell you what we'll do...Mr. Swanson, we'll try you out for a month." He said, "If it doesn't work out you can go back to your old job—I'll see to that." The Speaker at that time was, in effect, the number two most powerful man in the country. So, I said (here I am a punk, a punk in his early twenties), and I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, you won't hold it against me if I don't like it I want to go back." {laughter} And he laughed and he said, "Oh, that's fine." So in other words I went in as the assistant reading clerk.