

Civil Rights

Chairman Emanuel Celler's Strategy Robert Kimball, Legislative Assistant, Representative John V. Lindsay of New York

Robert Kimball describes Judiciary Chairman Emanuel Celler of New York's strategy for passing the Civil Rights Act in committee.

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You know, he had his staff, and he had his ways, and he had his agendas. I mean, you know, he wasn't successful all of the time, but he tried very hard to draft a strategy, or to propose a strategy which he thought would work, and that's what he did with the civil rights legislation. You know, as over the spring, more and more bills were introduced, including the most important one, the, the bill of the President, and that came in June. But he, when he started the hearings, he wanted to work a consensus, but it was his consensus. And his philosophy was, load the bill up, make it as strong as possible, and then let the Southern Democrats and the House Republicans cut it back. They would be the villains to the civil rights groups and he would be the hero. That's what he had done in 1957, with the first legislation. He did it again in 1960 with the second civil rights bill, and he tried to do it again in '63. It did not work, because the Republicans said, "No, we won't go along with this. We want this to be bipartisan from the start; we are not going to introduce legislation only to see it cut back at the whim of the chairman." So, when the Republicans refused to cut the bill back in the subcommittee, that, of course, upset Celler and his strategy enormously. And, of course, was a principal reason why things sort of fell apart in the committee.