

Civil Rights

Memories of Representative Howard Smith Robert Kimball, Legislative Assistant, Representative John V. Lindsay of New York

Robert Kimball describes the chairman of the House Rules Committee, Representative Howard W. Smith of Virginia.

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It's impossible to do complete justice to such a great and brilliant man. In person, he looked half asleep. He'd be standing near you and his eyes were drooping and he's shuffling. He was 80, but, and he wasn't really old mentally at all. He was incredibly sharp. But he tried to give the impression that he was only partly there, and I think he wanted to lull you into sleep when he was making proposals or suggestions. But he was regarded I think fairly universally as perhaps the outstanding legislator in the House, as the most brilliant tactician, the smartest, cleverest. Many people have written a little bit about him. Richard Bolling, in his book *House Out of Order*, talks about him very well.

And I had the privilege of being around him a lot and of speaking with him and watching him in action. It was a full-time job to just watch him and to try to observe what he focused on, what he didn't focus on, where he pressed his point strongly, where he tried to lure Members of Congress into making silly statements that he could use on the floor later. The man was a master. He was a virtuoso of the legislative process, and he tried, I think, basically to come across as a small-town country lawyer who didn't know very much, which was just the opposite of what it was. I mean, he was regarded as a superbly brilliant guy who had such knowledge and experience in the legislative process—he had been in Congress for many years—that people admired him, even if they disagreed with him.