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“Do You Swear to Tell the Truth?”

Michael R. Lemov remembers how Congressman John Moss of California interacted with major gas company presidents at the start of a congressional hearing.

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That morning I was sitting next to Moss, because I sort of handled the gas hearings, and they were all sitting at this long table in the Commerce Committee’s gorgeous hearing room in the Rayburn Building, paneled, wood paneled, beautiful hearing room, and the press table was packed and there were television cameras that day and there were reporters sitting on the floor between where we were up on the dais and the, and the table, many reporters with cameras. Moss didn’t tell me he was going to do this. We’d give Moss a black book the night before, a big black loose leaf book with the issues and, and suggested questions. He didn’t usually use our questions but he read, he read the book and then he asked his own questions. But anyway—amazing man. Amazing memory! And the stamina. So, the first thing he did was to say, “Gentlemen, good morning.” “Good morning, Mr. Moss.” “Good morning, gentlemen. Would you all please rise?” They didn’t know what he was doing, but they all rose. We had the seven presidents of the major oil companies standing in front of us. He said, “Please raise your right hands, gentlemen. Do you swear to tell the truth before this subcommittee?” The mouths. I do remember some of their mouths were a bit, seemed to drop, their jaws seemed to drop. They were stunned to be sworn to tell the truth. And so, those hearings got—and of course the reporters. That picture of them, with the hand in the air went all over the country. And Moss had a reason, he wasn’t just doing it for headlines.