

## **LEWIS DESCHLER, 71, DIES; EX- HOUSE PARLIAMENTARIAN**

By Wolfgang Saxon July 13, 1976;  
The New York Times  
July 13, 1976, Page 35

WASHINGTON, July 12 (AP) Lewis Deschler, retired parliamentarian who powerfully influenced the House of Representatives for 46 years, died today at Bethesda Naval Hospital after a series of strokes. He was 71 years old and resided in Bethesda, Md.

Mr. Deschler is survived by his wife, the former Virginia A. Cole; a son, Lewis Deschler 2d; a daughter, Mrs. William B. Eddy, and two grandchildren.

### **Low-Key Style**

Sitting within whispering distance of a succession of Speakers of the House, Lewis Deschler derived his powers from the ability to cite the thousands of precedents and intricate rules that govern that body. To the public, he was as invisible as a man of 6 feet 2 inches could be, and he preferred it that way. His passion for anonymity was legendary. Yet, when he retired two years ago on the advice of his physician, he left office laden with honors as the most influential and highest-paid employee of the House, which paid him a Representative's salary of \$42,500 a year.

Mr. Deschler's name reached the public print now and then, and when it did the occasion usually was of historic moment. Thus, his advice on procedures and precedents played a part in Speaker Carl Albert's decision in September 1973 against starting a House inquiry into the conduct of then Vice President Spiro T. Agnew.

### **Aided Statehood Bills**

Mr. Deschler also rendered an opinion that permitted the Alaska and Hawaii statehood bills to be steered past the Rules Committee where they were stalled. And it was he who worked out the exact date – April 7, 1933 – on which Americans could legally order their first beer following the repeal of Prohibition, resolving some timing conflicts between the House and Senate

versions of the repeal.

The volume of precedents the House parliamentarian and his staff are supposed to keep track of is staggering. There are more than 20,000 of them, uncodified since 1936, and they are the guiding interpretations of the rules under which the House operates.

Mr. Deschler entered the precedents in his notebooks as they arose. In 1965, he began the vast job of renewed codification, aided by a staff that included his daughter Joan Mari, Mrs. Eddy. As a consultant he continued that work of updating after his retirement until his recent illness. 'The Greatest'

To the late speaker Sam Rayburn, Mr. Deschler was "the big brain man" and the only great parliamentarian around. Speaker Albert even called him the greatest parliamentarian in the world.

At the same time, there were members who considered him too conservative. Others voiced resentment in 1972 when he seemed to reverse himself on a mass transit amendment to a highway bill at the bidding of the Speaker. And Ralph Nader once described him as "the hidden despot in the House."

One of the few anecdotes told about Mr. Descher in Washington recalls a day in 1932 when a man with a gun appeared in the House gallery; demanding to speak.

As the members scrambled for safety, the Representative who happened to be in the Speaker's chair at the time sought to join the stampede. At which point Mr. Descher restrained him, yelling: "You can't leave—you're presiding!"

### **Football Player**

He was born on March 3, 1905, in Chillicothe, Ohio. He played varsity football at ?? University in Oxford, ?? which he attended through his junior year. Planning to enter the foreign service, he then transferred to George Washington University.

That same year, 1925, he got a timekeeper's job at the Speaker's desk in the House of Representatives. The work, he

once said in a rare interview, left him with enough time on his hands during speeches to pick up parliamentary manuals and rule books for reading.

The young man's reading habits impressed Speaker Nicholas Longworth, who offered him the position of assistant parliamentarian in 1927. He was appointed parliamentarian a year later.

At the same time, Mr. Deschler formally studied law, and earned his law degree at National University in 1932.

