

MAN OF MANY RULES LEWIS DESCHLER

By Linda Charlton
Special to The New York Times
Sept. 27, 1973

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26— Somewhere on the list of those consulted by House Speaker Carl Albert in arriving at his decision today against holding an inquiry on Vice President Agnew is the name of Lewis Deschler—a name that, despite his 45 years' tenure in a highly influential post, means almost nothing to the world beyond Capitol Hill.

Mr. Deschler is the 68-year-old Parliamentarian of the House of Representatives, the highest-paid (\$42,000) and most powerful employee of the House and the only man who really knows the thousands of rules and precedents that govern what 435 Representatives may or may not do, and how.

A passion for anonymity is one of the more frequently proclaimed emotions, but Mr. Deschler is dedicated to achieving it: He is as nearly invisible as is possible for a six-foot, two-inch tall man who sits within whispering distance of the Speaker when the House is in session.

Keeper of the Wisdom

His office is just around the corner from the Speaker's own, on the second floor of the Capitol just outside the House chamber. His staff works in the Speaker's room on the other side of Mr. Albert's office. This proximity is no accident; he is perhaps the most nearly indispensable man on the south side of the Capitol.

There are 20,000 to 25,000 precedents — which are the guiding interpretations of the rules under which the House operates— and they have not been codified since 1936. But they are written down in Mr. Deschler's own notebooks, and he and his staff have been working since 1965 to bring them up to date. But meanwhile, he is the sole repository of the necessary wisdom. This man who, according to Representative Richard Bolling's 1965 book, "House Out of Order," is one who "cultivates anonymity," thus is influential because he knows so much that no one else does.

“I don't make rulings, just give opinions,” Mr. Deschler has said, but it is his opinions that guide the rulings. And he does more than that.

A Bubble of Humor

He answers requests for procedural guidance from the Speaker, above all, but also from House members. It was Mr. Deschler who traced out the procedures for declaring war, it was Mr. Deschler who found the necessary precedents to allow the Alaska and Hawaii statehood bills to be detoured around the Rules Committee, where they were blocked. It was Mr. Deschler who worked out the date on which thirsty Americans could once again order drinks after the repeal of Prohibition. (It was April 7, 1933.)

Anonymous he may love to be, but Mr. Deschler evidently allows an occasional bubble of humor to surface. He gave the bill number H.R. 1776 to the World War II lend lease legislation to aid Britain.

He was appointed assistant parliamentarian in 1927 by a Republican Speaker and has been reappointed by every Speaker since. He eschews any loyalties other than those he gives to each and every Speaker. One incident that demonstrates both his power and his obedience took place during a wrangle in 1972 over a highway bill. Mr. Deschler told several House members that he would rule a mass transit amendment to the bill, which Mr. Albert was believed to oppose, “in order” or legitimate. The next morning, however, he declared that the amendment was out of order.

Felt ‘Betrayed’

This prompted one member to call Mr. Deschler “an arm of the Speaker.”

Another said he felt “betrayed.” Lewis Deschler has been in Washington since 1925, when he came here from Ohio. He was born in Chillicothe on March 3, 1905, and was educated through his junior year of college at Miami University in Oxford, O., where he played varsity football as well. Transferring to George Washington University because he planned then to enter the Foreign Service, he got a job as timekeeper at the speaker's desk. “I had time on my hands during long speeches,” he said in a rare

1960 interview, “and generally picked up the House manual and other rule books for reading. The then Speaker Nicholas Longworth must have noticed my interest in the subject. He asked me if I would be interested in a position as assistant parliamentarian.”

Mr. Deschler said he had taken the job only “because if I didn't make good, they would soon find out and fire me.” That was in January, 1927. A year later, he became Parliamentarian. Studying law meanwhile, he got his law degree from National University in 1932.

‘Big Brain Man’

In 1931, he married Virginia A. Cole. They have two children, Lewis Deschler 2d, an attorney, and Jean Mari, now Mrs. William B. Eddy, who has worked as his assistant in the codification project. The Deschlers live in suburban Bethesda, Md.

There are few stories about this purposely unknown power on The Hill. There was the time he was introduced to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as “the man who has kept four House Speakers straight,” evoking from Mr. Roosevelt: “Why don't you let him work on the Senate?”

There is the late Speaker Sam Rayburn's description of him as “the big brain man” and “the only great” Parliamentarian of the House.

One story, perhaps the best, recalls a day in 1932 when a man brandishing a gun appeared in the House gallery and demanded to speak. As the House floor cleared, the Congressman who was in the Speaker's chair began to move out of the line of fire. Mr. Deschler restrained him, yelling: “You can't leave you're presiding!”

Albert Bars House Inquiry on Agnew Now

A SPEEDY DECISION MADE BY SPEAKER

By Otto Matthes, Staff Writer
Special—Grand Jury to End Session Today

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

Speaker Albert W. Harris today announced that he will refer to the House a bill to set up a grand jury to investigate the charges against Gov. Agnew. Harris said the bill would be introduced today.



Man of Many Rules Lewis Deschler

By Lewis Deschler
Special to The Evening Post

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26.—What was it that kept Deschler on the list of those considered for the House of Representatives? The answer is not his name, but his record. He has been a member of the House since 1947, and his record is one of the most impressive in the history of the House.

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