

# Everett Dirksen as Senate Minority Leader: Assessments by His Colleagues

by  
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The Dirksen Congressional Center  
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## Introduction

Today's political climate has produced a polarized Senate in which Republicans and Democrats rarely cross the aisle to work together on legislation. The respective party leaders mirror that characteristic—they, too, seldom seem to cooperate.

This state of affairs has led some observers to long for the days when the two parties, guided by pragmatic leaders, worked together to pass laws. Everett McKinley Dirksen, Republican from Illinois, is often held up as a model of a bipartisan leader. Dirksen was elected Republican leader, or Minority Leader, on January 7, 1959, and served until his death on September 7, 1969. He held the post under four presidents: Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959-60), Democrats John F. Kennedy (1961-63) and Lyndon Johnson (1963-68), and Republican Richard Nixon (1969).

Working with Senate Majority Leaders Lyndon Johnson (D-Texas) and Mike Mansfield (D-Montana), Dirksen helped pass some of the most significant legislation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Open Housing Act of 1968. The *New York Times* once called Dirksen “. . . probably the most effective leader the Republicans had had in the Senate for years.”

Times have changed, of course, and congressional politics bear little resemblance to the Great Society years during which Dirksen led his Republicans in the Senate. But people still matter. That Dirksen and not Barry Goldwater led the Republicans in the 1960s mattered. That Mitch McConnell and not Lamar Alexander lead the Republicans today matters.

What qualities did Everett Dirksen possess that allowed him to serve his party and his nation effectively and in bipartisan fashion? What were the ingredients of his success? What style characterized his leadership?

## The Torcom Interview Project

Fortunately for historians of Congress and students of leadership, Jean Torcom conducted a series of interviews with Dirksen's colleagues ten months after his death. Torcom, who worked for three summers in Dirksen's Senate office, entered graduate school at The Johns Hopkins University in the fall of 1964 determined to study Senate minority party leadership.

After nearly ten years, she completed her 408-page PhD dissertation, “Minority Leadership in the United States Senate: The Role and Style of Everett Dirksen” (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University, 1973). A preliminary report on her research took the form of a paper delivered at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, “Minority Leadership: the Role and Style of Everett Dirksen.”

Torcom relied in part on a set of interviews she conducted with Dirksen's Senate colleagues. The interviews were conducted during June and July 1970. Twenty-seven Republicans, representing all points of view within the Senate party, were included. They ranged in seniority from the ranking member of the Senate Republicans to several freshmen. The interviews were open-ended but basically the same questions were asked of each senator, with some variation depending on the individual's relationship with Senator Dirksen or on the exigencies of time. The sessions ranged from 15 to 50 minutes; the average was 25 to 30 minutes.

Figure 1 reproduces the list of questions Torcom prepared for her interview with Senator Howard Baker, Dirksen's son-in-law, who came to the Senate in 1967 and served two and half years with his father-in-law. The list is typical of the questions Torcom posed.

Friday 4/11/70

Senator: Howard Baker  
Began Service: 1967

Room: 2107 Time: 2:00 P.M.  
# 4944 6-25-70  
25 minutes

1. Republicans in minority -- what is function of min. party -- what can minority do, as a party; what is it supposed to do? To have impact on public policy.
2. In same vein, what is job of minority floor leader?
- (2a) How change when Republican in White House? (2b) ~~As a freshman senator in...~~
3. Contrast to Dems, Republican organization in Senate distributes party leadership more widely - What effect on strength of floor leader as contrasted with Democrats? 6

TO POLICY COMMITTEE:

What is relationship between Policy Committee and Floor Leader - is the Floor Leader responsible to the Policy Committee? Do they work together to develop positions?

- (3a) Has the relationship(s) changed among Republican leaders since Dirksen?
4. Democratic party leadership - what are potential sources of influence of minority floor leader (a) with members and (b) to have impact on bills?
5. About Dirksen - how effective was he? Why was he so effective/ineffective?
- (5a) How did he use the "sources of influence" available to him?
6. How characterize Dirksen's style - how see his job - maintain unity? develop party positions? How go about it?
7. When member torn between state and party loyalty, how would EMD try to get senator to change his position?
8. Relationships with Democratic Presidents - what effect on EMD's position - enhance, detract?

TO RANKING REPUBLICANS:

9. You are ranking Republican on      Committee. What relationship between you and EMD on bills from your Committee - did you consult on what should be party's position? on tactics for floor action? on amendments, etc.?

Without exception, all 27 Republican senators Torcom interviewed agreed that Dirksen was an effective leader. Many, representing all shades of opinion within the party, thought he was the most effective leader Senate Republicans had had, at least in their memory.

According to Torcom, Dirksen's effectiveness was the result of his legislative skill and knowledge of bills, his persuasiveness, his evenhanded and communicative relationships with his colleagues, his leverage with the Senate Democrats and with the White House, his ability to do countless favors for his colleagues and his care to do them, as well as his willingness to use all the perquisites and powers at his disposal. Add to that impressive mixture a willingness to *follow*. Dirksen at his peak effectiveness did not get too far away from the center in his party; he did not force divisive issues on his Republican colleagues; he was willing to change positions to accomplish a result.

At the same time, most recognized that his effectiveness was waning in the last years of his life. The interviewees identified several factors that accounted for the decline.

First, the character of the Republican party transformed. After the 1964 elections, Republicans in the Senate numbered 32. By 1969, however, their numbers were up to 43. Most of the newcomers were disenchanted with the old-school Dirksen, whom they believed portrayed the party badly. Liberals began to supplant conservatives in the party, too, and they were unhappy both with Dirksen's style and his conservative positions. They resented his efforts to continue to speak for their party when they opposed him.

Second, some believed that Dirksen took his press too seriously and too personally. His press conferences increasingly took on the flavor of a one-man show, and his popularity eventually led to a recording career having nothing to do with his duties in the Senate.

Third, Dirksen became preoccupied with pet projects, such as his constitutional amendments regarding school prayer and the "one man, one vote" decision of the Supreme Court. He appeared to grow distance from the legislative priorities held by most members of his party.

Finally, several of the interviewees noted Dirksen's failing health and his lack of vigor. They were generally willing to give him the benefit of the doubt on this score, but Dirksen's leadership suffered as his health deteriorated.

### **Editorial Note**

The Dirksen Congressional Center has selected for this feature portions of the Torcom interview transcripts that deal directly with Everett Dirksen's leadership. We have not included responses to more general questions about Senate minority leadership. We have also selected only those comments related to Dirksen from more lengthy responses to general questions.

To improve the clarity and readability of the responses, we have deleted the immaterial pauses indicated in the original texts and inserted punctuation.

The interview transcripts are located in Collection 77 at The Dirksen Congressional Center.

Frank H. Mackaman  
The Dirksen Congressional Center

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## George Aiken (R-Vermont)



George David Aiken (1892-1984)  
Senate Years of Service: 1941-75  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=A000062>

*Question: Has the relationship among the leaders changed since Dirksen's death?*

Aiken: "I think that the situation has changed some. Not that the majority of Republicans agreed with Senator Dirksen, in fact a lot of them disagreed and I've seen votes taken in the Senate when he'd be virtually the only Republican to vote that way, but the strength of Senator Dirksen was his ability to get along with people. He'd get along with President Johnson, he got along with President Nixon, he got along with Senator Mansfield, and they'd work things out. He was diplomatic, and he never tried to use a whip."

*Question: What do you think made Senator Dirksen an effective leader?*

Aiken: "He was an effective leader because he got along with people, whether he agreed with them or not, and he got along with the other party; he got along with the Executive Branch. He got along with the various organizations that are interested in legislation. It was his ability to get along that made him a leader."

*Question: How would you characterize Dirksen's style?*

Aiken: "Well, Senator Dirksen had a sense of humor—and he was good on quotations (much chuckles)—and he made his quotations so his humor fit the occasion. He had no enemies, no real enemies, personal enemies. Political enemies, maybe "yes." There again, it resolves itself down to his ability to get along with people, and a leader should be able to get along with people."

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## Gordon L. Allott (R-Colorado)



Gordon Llewellyn Allott (1907-1989)  
Senate Years of Service: 1955-1973  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=A000161>

*Question: Was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Allott: "Well certainly effective, yes. . . . He had a quality which . . . he could feel very strongly about something and, taking myself for example, I might feel very strongly the other way. He'd do all he could to press his point of view; and you would do yours. But the next day it was all forgotten. This was one of his strongest qualities. His ability to work with diverse people. But . . . in later years he would jump into the matter where respective members had expertise—without full consultation. But he had this other quality—he bore no grudges—and because of his other abilities, carried over. He had one other quality. He—Johnson certainly knew a lot but I thought he couldn't hold a candle to Dirksen—he had the most fantastic memory, for people and situations, and he knew more about government and the way things operate than anyone I know."

*Question: What kinds of appeals would he make to keep the party together?*

Allott: "Well, he didn't make appeals as such. But his work with everyone in the party was very effective in the first few years. But as . . . his health got to be so variable, he didn't consult as much. . . . Bill Knowland, who preceded him, was a fine man, intelligent, certainly courageous, but Bill never mastered the technique of getting down to, 'Now, Joe, what do you think of this?' Bill was trying to be a [Robert] Taft without his expertise. He was uncommunicative. And then, along comes this garrulous, gregarious fellow—the party was looking for someone like him."

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## Howard Baker (R-Tennessee)



Howard Henry Baker, Jr. (1925- )  
Senate Years of Service: 1967-1985  
<http://bioquide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000063>

NOTE: Senator Baker was Everett Dirksen's son-in-law.

*Question: What made Dirksen so effective?*

Baker: “. . . I think really he had strength in several categories that added up to effectiveness. One, he got along pretty well with everybody; he had a real, genuine concern for the other fella's requirements, other member's requirement and sensibilities. Yet he was strong and tough when the occasion demanded. He had an enormous respect for the institutions of government. He was a party loyalist, but, most of all, he had a great affection for, and respect for, his colleagues in the Senate, on both sides of the aisle. That's one reason he and Mansfield got along so well, I think. I'm certain that they never spoke with less than complete candor to each other. And I'm sure that there were many, many accommodations reached between those two men that the Senate never fully understood and that contributed to their respective roles in leadership. You gotta remember that a leader in the Senate, whether majority or minority leader, really doesn't lead as a drill sergeant leads, or even as a whip in the House leads, because in the Senate there's so much more individuality, so much less party discipline. The rules are so much less restrictive. Seniority means so much less in the Senate than in the House that you don't really lead in the the classical sense. You sorta 'urge' and create a previous inclination to follow, rather than leading.”

*Question: What were the techniques he used to create that “previous disposition to follow”?*

Baker: “He was genuinely concerned for every single member of the Republican party in the Senate. He wanted to know what their requirements were, what the subtleties and eccentricities of their own representation were—of their state, their constituency, their personality. He always wanted to try to honor those unique requirements. No one has ever doubted that Ev Dirksen was concerned about every single member of the Senate. . . . Beyond that he had an unmistakable air of sincerity. I seriously doubt that anybody ever really doubted his sincerity on a major issue—or thought that he . . . had any purpose other than to lead and to serve. He wasn’t running for President, or anything else.”

*Question: Did Dirksen deliberately, as a tactic, go way out on an issue at the outset to gain a bargaining position in order to bring other senators back toward the center?*

Baker: “No, I don’t think he was that artful—he was artistic in his leadership, but he wasn’t artful in the sense of deceptive. No, I don’t think that happened. I think more often than not, his position literally did change, and his view of a situation altered as time went by. But I don’t think there’s any stratagem to stake out a position to the right of where he thought he’d end up. Dirksen has another attribute and trait that not many people really have and that is, virtually every idea he held, he held tentatively. And the world would be better off if more people did that these days.”

*Question: If Dirksen wanted to change somebody else’s mind on an issue, how would he go about it?*

Baker: “He did it in different ways. He used to claim that his speeches on the Floor probably had never changed many votes—maybe once or twice. I don’t think he really believed that—and I know I don’t believe it. Thus, especially in the early stages of a debate, major debates that went on for several days or weeks, especially in the early stages, a Dirksen speech had a profound impact on many in the Senate, and I think helped set up a predisposition to be for or against a measure. So I think he underrated the power and the impact of his speeches on the Floor.

“His one-to-one relationship to senators probably affected more members than anything else . . . he was genuine, he was sincere, he was concerned for what other members required and for a way he could try to be helpful. More often than not, that gave him a chance to try to influence their position, their judgement on issues.

“Additionally, he simply collected I.O.U.’s—and so on occasion he cashed them out. And he could cash them out—with great, brutal bloodiness when he did it. On occasion, one occasion I’m thinking about, he simply told a member, ‘You owe me this vote,’ and he collected. I saw that only once, but I saw it happen. So he had quite an arsenal of devices.”

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## Henry Bellmon (R-Oklahoma)



Henry Louis Bellmon (1921-2009)  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1981  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000351>

*Question: Do you think Dirksen was an effective leader?*

“I think he was a tremendously effective spokesman for the party and extremely effective in formulating and helping on public opinion. I don’t know of a case where he ever tried to muscle a member into a position. . . .”

“When I think of the powers of the office, I think in terms of his affect on public opinion. I think Everett Dirksen did a very, very—almost commonly, almost regularly—used the powers of his office as a minority leader to take positions that were helpful to the President or which he felt were—to make statements that he felt needed to be made to present the opposite side of the case, as opposed to the things that the Democrats were saying. . . .”

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## Wallace Bennett (R- Utah)



Wallace Foster Bennett (1898-1993)  
Senate Years of Service: 1951-1974  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000384>

*Question: What made Dirksen an effective leader?*

Bennett: “The depth of his experience, and I’ve never met a man who had more political perception. He knew what was the politically wise thing to do, the right thing to do. He was a pro in the very best sense of the word, and he brought that to bear on his job.”

*Question: How did Dirksen use the meager sources of leadership at his disposal?*

Bennett: “We hold . . . a weekly luncheon which doesn’t leave much time for discussion or argument, but the minority leader is always recognized no matter who else talks, he does; he has the chance to say what he wants to say. So that gives him a springboard. Dirksen spoke freely and candidly and honestly about what his position was. Occasionally he would be challenged by somebody and engaged in a discussion, but again it’s his ability to persuade.”

*Question: How would you describe Dirksen’s style? How did he see his job? To maintain unity?*

“. . . There never has been an attempt to develop a firm party position, so that if you voted the other way you were considered to be a traitor. I’ve had the feeling that all during these years he knew where the men were who didn’t want to be part of his point of view. He knew that men like Senator Case for instance—he wouldn’t get them, wouldn’t get their support, except under rather unusual circumstances. I think he knew the men. He worked on each of us, when he felt he wanted something, or we wanted something. He handled each of us as separate individuals. I always felt perfectly free to

go over in his office, talk to him about my problems, discuss the bill that was coming up, and he always had exhibited to me an attitude of complete desire to help me—anything I wanted, he would do.”

*Question: What would Dirksen do to try to get a man to change his position?*

Bennett: “He’d ask you to come and see him, or he’d come to your office. He’d just be very frank about it. I’ll always remember—it’s only happened to me once—way back in the 50s. At the end of the session, there was a close vote coming up, and I ordinarily had a position which I thought was Dirksen’s position. But he and Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall [R-Massachusetts] met me on the floor and said, ‘This is the legislative situation. If you vote the way I think you’re going to vote, you’re not going to accomplish anything, but you’re going to create this problem and this problem and this problem.’ I said, ‘Alright, I see it, and I’ll vote the way you think I should.’ I cast the deciding vote, which upset a lot of people. It’s a case where the legislative situation, which the ordinary man on the outside couldn’t understand, was in conflict with [Bennett’s own position].”

*Question: Do you think Dirksen’s close relationship with President Johnson enhanced or hurt his position as leader?*

Bennett: “I think it enhanced it. I had one experience with him, referring to a question of an appointment. I had a candidate for a job and Johnson didn’t want him—made no bones about it. But Dirksen stayed with me, and we got one or two other Democrats to help. Johnson always said to me afterwards, ‘You, I didn’t want that man, you forced me to take him.’ Then he added, ‘But he’s the best appointment I made in all my term of office.’ Well, he could do that. He had the kind of relationship that, I’m not sure they didn’t call each other by their first names when they got in the White House and nobody else was around.”

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## John Sherman Cooper (R-Kentucky)



John Sherman Cooper (1901-1991)  
Senate Years of Service: 1946-1949; 1952-1955; 1956-1973  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000758>

NOTE: Senator Cooper lost to Everett Dirksen in the 1959 election to Senate Minority Leader.

*Question: Why did you run against Dirksen in 1959? Do you think he was an effective leader?*

Cooper: "Yes. I became a candidate at that time because we'd just gone through a period under the leadership of Senator Knowland of California. . . . There was a group of us who were against Senator Knowland for two reasons: one was that he did not keep us informed, and two, on issues where he had no particular expertise, where there were others on our side who did have expertise, . . . [he still wanted to keep the leadership to himself].

. . . He just wanted to run everything without ever conferring with anybody. I don't want to be unfair to him, but I think that is true. There were 14 or 15 of us—we had only 30, maybe 32 members then, and we decided we oughta get somebody to run to impress on other members of the Republican side that we expected to be heard, we expected to be informed, and this was a way of doing it. We didn't have the votes. I think the vote was 18 to 14 or something like that, but we felt that some good came out of it because, we come to Senator Dirksen then; he was very good about keeping members informed, and having meetings where people could give their views. At the same time, he was quite a party man; he also had a good sense of timing. He threw his weight in at times, for example on the civil rights bill, education bills, where before he'd said he'd never go that road.

*Question: Do you agree that Dirksen's tactic was to go way out right on a bill on purpose so that he could gain a bargaining position?*

Cooper: “He changed positions many, many times. But when he was elected leader, President Eisenhower was president. [Dirksen] was very proud of his statement, ‘I carry the flag, I carry the flag, I carry the flag.’ I think he stuck with President Eisenhower pretty much. . . . He seemed to be against any new civil rights bill. And then when one was introduced [the Civil Rights Act of 1964], I happened to be at the meeting where there were a number of other black leaders, and he told ‘em very flatly that he couldn’t go along with the bill. But, in the end (chuckles), he not only went along but he threw his weight in at a very good—he had good timing. . . .

“It [the bargaining tactic] could’ve been. I never heard it expressed exactly that way. What I thought of chiefly was that he would change positions, sometimes a complete reversal, and at a time when a piece of legislation seemed unlikely to pass, unlikely to be considered, threw his influence in and then said that ‘I did it.’ He wasn’t bashful about saying it.

“But what I say about him, I say with respect for him—I liked him, we were friends. He had another characteristic, I think was helpful. He didn’t hold any malice toward people who didn’t go along. I suppose he knew himself he didn’t always go along, he’d change . . . but he didn’t hold any bitterness or malice. I think he had a feel of himself, too, in a historic sense, that he would attach himself to major legislation in a way which he could believe and could say, with a good deal of truthfulness, that his influence had made it possible. . . .

“I’ll say this, we were talking about an effective leader, about how he was an effective leader in the sense that I’ve told you about. Whether you agree with his position or not, he had the ability to throw in, use his influence at a time that is important. He also had the interest in what he’d accomplished, getting something done, which was of importance, and so he also could know that he had a part in it. Some of us who are perhaps on a different side—you might call more the middle—in the latter year or two, we do not think he was very effective, but he was ill then. . . . President Nixon, I don’t think, did let him run things like he had before; he seemed rather frustrated. But he was ill then.”

*Question: Where did Dirksen’s influence come from?*

Cooper: “. . . it depends also upon his relationships with the members of his party. As I said, in Senator Dirksen’s case, he never seemed to hold any grudges whatever your position was. And I suppose one’s attention to business, to details, to being available to members of the party, and his own skill in a parliamentary way. . . .

“I think in that sense he got along pretty well with all groups. Senator Javits, you might think of him as an example of another group, yet they seemed to respect each other, work together, particularly on the civil rights bill. Senator Dirksen also had some influence across the aisle, on the Democratic side. I think they expected him to protect them on certain things; that’s where his not as liberal side would turn up. But we’re

talking about him more as an individual, I think, the type of individual who did pretty well as a minority leader.”

*Question: How would Dirksen attempt to change someone’s position?*

Cooper: “I can only say the way he would act with me. Sometimes he’d come along with a soft voice and say, ‘John, I hope you can help us on this,’ or ‘hope you’ll work with us on this.’ Maybe a couple of times I’d vote, he’d come back and say, ‘mmmmnh, surely not on this one.’ [much chuckles]. We’d laugh, and I’d say, ‘Surely yes, Everett.’

*Question: How would you compare Dirksen’s style to his successor, Hugh Scott?*

Cooper: [After describing Scott’s style in detail, with brief references to Dirksen] “I don’t think he’s as well informed on issues as Everett was. Not that he doesn’t have the ability. There’s one thing I had to always admire in Everett: that whatever issue was on the floor, he seemed to put his mind right around it and grip it, in detail. I think you have to be able to do that.”

*Question: How did Dirksen’s style compare to Lyndon Johnson’s?*

“ . . . Knowing Senator Dirksen, I don’t believe he ever just put great pressure on anyone, or rein them as I know President Johnson did.”

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## Carl Curtis (R-Nebraska)



Carl Thomas Curtis (1905-2000)  
Senate Years of Service: 1955-1979  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C001006>

*Question: About Dirksen, how effective was he as leader?*

Curtis: “Dirksen never seemed in a hurry talking to any senator. If I went to see him with something that I was concerned about, or worried about, or meant a great deal to my state, he never put you off. He would stand there and listen and hear you clear out before he opened his mouth. If he was trying to get up votes for a strong showing on something, he was never harsh nor vindictive if somebody said, ‘Well, I just can’t go along with that this time.’ His speechmaking was just a part of it. He had leadership—he had a gift of leadership.”

*Question: How did Dirksen use his meagre resources to get a senator to come around?*

Curtis: “He would make a personal appeal, and it wouldn’t be threatening. It would be a warm, personal appeal that he’d like to have them vote that way if they possibly could. On a close vote, it’s entirely possible that he would be able to change those two or three votes that might make the difference between victory and defeat.”

*Question: How did Dirksen see his job—how would you characterize his style?*

Curtis: “I think he recognized himself as the leader of the Republicans in the Senate. I think he recognized that he was a leader outside the Senate, that he was a national figure. I think that he regarded himself as the ‘champion’ of individual Republican senators and also the champion of the Administration if our Administration was in power. He was the spokesman. He was articulate. He could state the case for them in

the most persuasive way. Plus he worked at it. Dirksen was usually well informed on issues.”

*Question: How would you compare Dirksen’s style with Knowland’s?*

Curtis: “Senator Knowland had a more difficult time subrogating his own personal opinions of a political issue to that of the Eisenhower Administration than did Dirksen. . . . [Knowland] was also a man of very strong convictions, almost rigid, where the ideal floor leader has to have some talent along the times of compromising and brining people. [Dirksen’s] skill is in bringing people together rather than in the declaration of his own views. . . . If an issue came along where his [Knowland] standing and view was very pronounced and maybe the Administration’s view didn’t quite coincide with it . . . with him it was a struggle . . . . I believe [that] to Dirksen, compromise was a strategy to do the greatest amount of good. I believe that to Knowland, compromise was distasteful—to him it meant evading of principle.”

*Question: How did Dirksen’s style compare to Johnson’s?*

Curtis: “Lyndon and Dirksen were quite different. Dirksen didn’t have any mean streak in him at all; he was never rough on anybody; he didn’t punish; and he didn’t ostracize because people didn’t tow the line.”

*Question: Did Dirksen’s deliberately go way out on an issue and then move to the center to bring others with him?*

Curtis: “Dirksen had a sense of drama—yes he did—he had a sense of drama and loved a fight and he gloried in leading it. I recall the fight to save section 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act. I was with the little group that called on him and asked him to lead that fight. When he agreed to it, I knew we had a battle won. We might have won it anyway, but he swung into it with enthusiasm. The press centered on it, and it appeared that he was winning. They were saying so, and that fired him on all the more.”

*Question: But did Dirksen use such a tactic on some bills like the civil rights bill in 1964?*

Curtis: “It might have been, it might have been. I don’t know. And I suppose that every senator—there’s so many issues and you’re called on to pass judgement on so many things, that with the best of preparation, you sometimes speak out on something before you’ve gone into it in as much depth and weighed all the consequences, and see what’s involved. I believe that Dirksen as minority leader probably spoke impulsively at times, like other people do and, a little more reflection on it, he did change his position.”

*Question: Can you describe the strategy Dirksen used to have an impact on a bill?*

Curtis: “It’s a little bit hard to describe, because it’s a mixture of personality and his oratory and his appearance and so many things. I think you’re probably right—that at times he would announce a position, then it would appear almost like a retreat, but in so

doing, he appeared as the compromiser, and the man in the center of the road around which they should rally.”

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## Robert Dole (R-Kansas)



Robert Joseph Dole (1923- )  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1996  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=D000401>

*Question: Did you ever sense any resentment over Dirksen's stands?*

Dole: "No . . . I think we understood that probably he'd done a lot for the Republican party. He'd become number one, Mr. Republican, without anyone else around, and he was the most sought after man in the Senate. You could watch in the gallery and see people peering over the edge trying to find Senator Dirksen—so he was really a great help to the party. I think he was instrumental in advancing the cause of civil rights, which should help our party . . . Now, from a strictly partisan view I think many of us were distressed at this [Dirksen's support of Kennedy in Cuba and Johnson in Southeast Asia], but I think as we look back on it, we feel that he probably did the right thing. This was his obligation first, to his country, of course, and you find it hard to fault it."

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## Paul Fannin (R-Arizona)



Paul Jones Fannin (1907-2002)  
Senate Years of Service: 1965-1977

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000013>

*Question: What was it like for Dirksen to serve with a Democrat in the White House?*

Fannin: “He was adept at maneuvering, working through legislation that was beneficial without the Democrats getting credit for it. He, of course, in many instances made the decisions that determined whether legislation would be passed or would be killed. So I think he performed a great service there. He was a master in that regard. There are very few that have that ability.”

*Question: How did he get into a position to do that?*

Fannin: “I think through hard work. I was really amazed when I first came back here to find he spent so much time on his legislative activities. I considered Senator Dirksen a very brilliant man, but I didn’t think he was an extremely hard working person. But I found out that he was memorizing, working on different matters just continuously, so that when something would supposedly flow from his lips, they talk about his ability . . . . But it didn’t come easy. I found that Senator Dirksen did work hard and that he did have that natural ability. But natural ability would not have accomplished the objectives many times, so he had to really study . . . .”

*Question: As a freshman senator in 1965, did you go to him for help?*

Fannin: “He was always very cooperative. I worked with him. It so happened that a short time after I came here, I became involved in some legislation in which he was vitally interested—that’s section 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act. I went to him for advice and he

first told me, he said it was hopeless, that he didn't think that anything could be done. And I explained to him that I had done some checking, and that I felt differently about it. He said, 'Fine, you bring me the information and we'll talk about it.' So I gathered together a sufficient number of senators to convince him, and we went to his office and we gave him the statistical information as far as what we could do. He started taking the leadership, and from then on, I worked very closely with him, on many different activities, and I found him very helpful, cooperative and a great friend."

*Question: Has the relationship changed among Republican leaders since Dirksen's death?*

Fannin: "I think that Senator Dirksen had an ability that few people have to pull senators together . . . I think that he brought unity to the group to a greater extent than anyone that I've ever known . . . I just think there're very few people that have the innate ability that Senator Dirksen had. He could bring you into line—so-called line—but he did it in a way that you benefited by it. He didn't do it detrimentally to you. In other words, he would work it out where you could get credit for something that perhaps you'd [didn't] deserve it necessarily. But if he thought that you'd work with him and cooperate with him, he'd pay you off, but on the basis of the extent of your work."

*Question: What are the potential sources of influence a minority leader might have?*

Fannin: "I think anyone around here observed the amount of influence that Senator Dirksen had on Senator Mansfield. But he earned it—he didn't just force it, he worked with Senator Mansfield. He sometimes brought Senator Mansfield around to his thinking. Other times, he came around to Senator Mansfield's thinking. But they worked many times as a team—it was very beneficial, I think, to the Senate. Some of our members would get provoked about it . . . . But, a number of bills were passed that otherwise would not have been passed, so I think it did work out . . . ."

*Question: How did Dirksen persuade someone to support his position?*

Fannin: "Well, of course, Senator Dirksen was always fair. But he was sometimes very stern and not demanding, but he would be very persuasive. I would say this: he did protect members many times and earned their support. He cooperated with them and, naturally, was a great friend of most of the senators, and worked with them on campaigns, on special activities, so I think he was in a very unique situation."

*Question: What made Dirksen an effective leader?*

Fannin: ". . . first of all he must be knowledgeable. He was a good parliamentarian, knowledgeable. He did have a good background and, of course, his years of experience. He could discuss almost any subject properly, . . . and had the ability to decipher his opposition and determine just how to handle that opposition—what would be most persuasive in that regard."

*Question: How would characterize Dirksen's style?*

Fannin: "I think it's a dual responsibility, a dual position. Because he not only accepted the responsibility, but he carried through. In other words, he was faithful in his attendance. Very few times that Senator Dirksen was not there unless he happened to have been ill, but he always carried through on his assignments. Nighttime or whatever—holidays—whenever he was needed to be available. He always could be reached. He delegated authority. He used other people and utilized his staff . . . he had good staff people."

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## Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona)



Barry Morris Goldwater (1909-1998)  
Senate Years of Service: 1953-1965; 1969-1987  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=G000267>

*Question: Do you think Dirksen was an effective leader?*

Goldwater: "I think he was a very effective leader."

*Question: Did Dirksen have equally good relations with all members of the party?*

Goldwater: "No, I wouldn't say 'good.' I would say there were friendly. But he didn't go out of his way to help or hurt. Now if he felt that by buttering up a Javits, Javits could help him get something else over, he'd do it—and this is leadership."

*Question: How did Dirksen's leadership compare to Knowland's?*

Goldwater: "Senator Knowland and Senator Dirksen had a lot in common. Only Knowland was completely unyielding. When they called him the bull in the china shop, that's just what Bill was, and is. I know several times he relinquished his seat as floor leader because he couldn't agree with the president's desires, and argued against the president's desires from another seat in the Senate. Dirksen would never do that. Dirksen would say 'Well, I don't like it, but let's see what we can do.'"

*Question: On civil rights in 1964, do you believe Dirksen staked out a position in opposition to the bill and then came back to the center as a deliberate tactic to gain bargaining position?*

Goldwater: "No, because the civil rights bill was one that we all wanted to vote for. I couldn't vote for it because we couldn't get the proposers to change the wording of two

clauses that I thought were unconstitutional . . . . Now the objections that Dirksen had were changed, and he went with it—this happens all the time. But I don't think he did it for any particular advantage . . . .”

*Question: How did Dirksen go about changing someone's position?*

Goldwater: “He usually, like all of them do, they call you down to the office and say, ‘Now we understand your position on this, but we need your vote. Now is there something we can do to make this legislation acceptable to you that's not going to ruin the purpose and the end of the legislation?’”

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## Robert Griffin (R-Michigan)



Robert Paul Griffin (1923- )  
Senate Years of Service: 1966-1979  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=G000465>

*Question: Was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Griffin: "Well, he was very effective. But it's hard to put your finger on why he was so effective. I can never recall that he ever came up to me and asked me for a vote. . . . It's largely a personal thing; there was an aura about him when he came on the floor."

*Question: Was there resentment about Dirksen's closeness to the Johnson White House?*

Griffin: "I think some. There was sometimes the feeling that Dirksen and Johnson would get together and then make some sort of agreement and that would be it. There was some dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation. That it was a one-man show."

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## Edward Gurney (R-Florida)



Edward John Gurney (1914-1996)  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1974  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=G000531>

*Question: What resources does a minority leader have to do the job?*

Gurney: “. . . Everett Dirksen, I suppose, is the shining example of what you can do when you’re a very effective floor leader, very articulate person. At times, when he was in command of the minority, he was outnumbered two to one in the Senate, and yet he was frequently referred to as the Senate leader because he was so extremely effective in using his troops and also expressing himself. Also his knowledge of parliamentary procedure. He was a very powerful man in the Senate through a combination of all these qualities.”

*Question: You came to the Senate late in Dirksen’s career. Did you have an opportunity to work with him?*

Gurney: “Yes, I knew Dirksen fairly well even though I was here only a short time. He lives in Florida, has a winter home near where I do. I knew him when I was over in the House. He would work mainly by persuasion. If we had a vote which was important, where people normally voted one side and he wanted them to vote on another, he’d go around and say, ‘Can’t you help us out on this one, we need you badly?’ and things like that. Occasionally, he managed to swing a few votes—not occasionally, usually. He just did it by persuasion, no threats—nothing like that—simply persuasion.”

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## Clifford Hansen (R-Wyoming)



Clifford Peter Hansen (1912-2009)  
Senate Years of Service: 1967-1987  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000170>

*Question: What are the sources of influence for a minority leader?*

Hansen: “I think Senator Dirksen has the respect of a lot of people. My personal feeling is that while he was alive he was the single most influential man in the Senate. I think he was probably more helpful—I don’t think I need to qualify it by saying probably. I think he was more helpful to President Johnson in getting some very important, landmark legislation passed than any other one person. Without Ev Dirksen’s help, we wouldn’t have any civil rights legislation of any significance passed. I think on a number of issues this is true, and I think he had that ability. In addition to ability, I should say that I think you’ve got to demonstrate some concerns that will capture the imagination and the appreciate of a majority of the people, and this is something that you must build slowly. . . . [A third source of influence] It just takes a lot of hard work, a lot of individual concern. Senator Dirksen, a few times if I would ask a personal favor of him. Despite the fact that I was one of the young neophytes around here, he was not too busy to make a personal effort. Just let me illustrate what I mean by that.

“Just a couple of months before he died, I called him and told him that I wanted very much to see the president, who was then in California. And he was out at Bethesda. Well, he called me back within a day’s time, and he’d taken the trouble to make some personal calls and to grease the skids so that I was able to get in to visit Senator Tower and Congressman George Bush, and I went out there to see him. It was I who had asked that the appointment be set up, and Senator Dirksen arranged it. Something like that just endears you to him—I mean, endears a person to you. He was a consummate

politician, and he did not forget that the art of politics is the care and feeding of egos. When you do something for people who are not as important as other people are, they don't forget it. When the situation arises that you could go either way on, at that point a strong leader, one with these various attributes in his background, can say, 'I'd like your help on this,' [and] you're sure going to be inclined to help him."

*Question: How effective was he?*

Hansen: "Very effective. I'm aware that a number of issues he championed failed, and he wasn't able always to have his way, but I don't think that that detracts from his leadership . . . . He was one of the most skilled orators I think I've seen operate, and undoubtedly that, too, was an important attribute that didn't hurt him any. . . . I think I'd have to say his influence extended pretty well across the board."

*Question: As a freshman, did he help you?*

Hansen: "I can say this, he, despite the fact he was a very busy man, he took time right from the start to let me know that I was important to him. This, too, is the mark of a very consummate politician."

*Question: How do you think he saw his job as leader—try to maintain unity, develop positions on issues, what?*

Hansen: "I think he really, genuinely had a very broad concern for what he believed truly was the national interest—if anyone can identify that . . . but as I think about efforts in which I watched him participate and take a position, to begin with over here, and then at the crucial time come around and take another position, indicated to me that I'm not so sure he changed his mind as what he was doing really was to bring those on this side nearer the center. On civil rights I think that this was demonstrated—that if he had been with the so-called opposition from the start, I don't think we would have gotten as good a piece of civil rights legislation passed as we finally got adopted. He knew how to oppose initially and how to present the most adamant position. Then, through skillful maneuvering, bring both sides much nearer agreement. He had the great ability at the proper time when he thought that we'd arrive at the place where there should be agreement reached, it didn't bother him a bit to switch over. Sometimes people would inveigh against him, but he seemed to know how to do it."

*Question: How did Dirksen go about getting someone to change positions?*

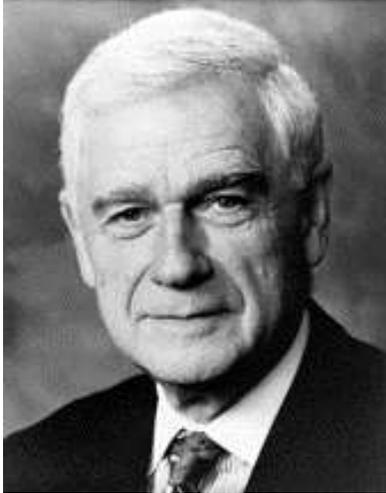
Hansen: "I don't know what techniques he may have employed with others. A few times I did not join with him . . . . But I never, as far as my personal experience is concerned, never found him threatening or suggesting any recrimination of any kind at all. He didn't seem to bear any, harbor any resentment at all from what you would do. You could oppose him on an issue that I'm certain many times may have been most important to him and he couldn't get your support. But, gee, the next day here he would be back just his warm, gracious self, eager to work with you. This, too, makes you respect him all the

more, as I do.”

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## Mark Hatfield (R-Oregon)



Mark Odom Hatfield (1922-2011)  
Senate Years of Service: 1967-1997

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000343>

*Question: What do Republicans expect of their leader?*

Hatfield: "Senator Dirksen was a very unusual person, as well as Senator Johnson before he became President Johnson. They were the last of what might be called the old structured, highly stylized leader who could say, 'This is the policy and it's been given from on high and everyone fall into line.' If everyone didn't want to fall into line, they were able to exert certain pressures and influences, [a] twisting of arm, whatever it might be, technique. With the newer senators and the changing scene here of the Senate of the United States, Hugh Scott, to me, is the ideal kind of leader. He represents the diplomacy, the sensitivity of people in the Senate not to demand or command or dominate or twist arms, but rather in an erudite, diplomatic kind of way, he attempts to persuade. He has broadened the base of leadership from that of a one-man, vest pocket kind of leadership role, to every man is a participant."

*Question: Despite the fact that minority leaders don't have much power, Dirksen was referred to as being very powerful—what were the sources of his influence?*

Hatfield: "Without sounding crass or demeaning, I think the minority leader is, in many ways, a power broker in the sense that it will make the difference as to whether he can represent a certain block of votes, either for or against a measure. It was widely acknowledged that both the Test Ban Treaty and the civil rights bill of 1964 were dependent . . . upon Senator Dirksen and his capacity to swing a certain number of Republican votes. So in that kind of a power brokerage role is where this minority leader [does not complete the thought]. And then it depends a great deal on how much of the

minority he can represent, or really, so-called 'deliver.' It was increasingly difficult for Senator Dirksen to deliver the Republican side in the last year or two of his role. There were numerous occasions where he voted on a minority side of the minority side."

*Question: Describe the criticism of Dirksen that he would state positions that didn't represent the views of the party.*

Hatfield: ". . . there were a number of times in which a position was announced by Senator Dirksen at a Tuesday luncheon of the Policy Committee that he'd been over at the White House that morning, visiting with the president, and he'd said this to the president, or he'd said that to the president, which sounded to the average listener as a commitment. And there was a feeling of 'well now wait a minute, you may have said that for your own role or your own position, but . . . why did you imply that you said it for me?'"

*Question: Was he an effective leader?*

Hatfield: "Yes. Even when I disagreed with him. I think he was effective in that he was able to put together coalitions, divergent viewpoints, on a thing like the Test Ban Treaty and the civil rights law, both of which were before I came to the Senate. He was less effective his last year. But I think that in the overall picture of the Dirksen period, I would think he would be rated as a very effective leader.

"He knew how to work within his own party. He was able to cajole, was able to do various other things to bring them along. He was able to work across the aisle with Mr. Johnson as majority leader, and later with Mr. Mansfield, and then with President Johnson, with President Kennedy, with President Eisenhower.

"He has the flexibility, which oftentimes was the point criticized most about him. Where did he stand? He flip-flopped . . . he was on one side, then he'd end up on the other. But here again, from the workings of the Senate and the Executive with the Legislative, I would have to rank Senator Dirksen as a very effective leader. For that style of leadership. But I would emphasize that era, I believe, has passed."

*Question: How did Dirksen "bring them along?"*

Hatfield: "He certainly was a great parliamentarian. He knew the parliamentary procedures. He knew the interests of each individual person in the Senate. He knew how to appeal to their interests. He knew how to finagle. If one senator had a bill (and he knew all of these things) that was being boxed in or hung-up somewhere in the committee, and he wanted that senator's support for another bill, he knew how to get that bill out of the box and get that senator's support on his measure (chuckle). It was just that type of wheeling and dealing."

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## Roman Hruska (R-Nebraska)



Roman Lee Hruska (1904-1999)  
Senate Years of Service: 1954-1976  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000875>

*Question: Is it possible for the minority leader to be effective?*

Hruska: "The classic example of that is the Civil Rights Act of 1964. . . . Without the leadership of Senator Dirksen, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 never would have been enacted, nor any of the succeeding acts. He performed a great service on that and was able to virtually, not to dictate the terms, but certainly to influence the direction in which it went. . . . He did not do it single-handed of course, because he had to have help from the ranks, but they responded and it was a good result."

*Question: Did Dirksen stake out a position in the extreme in order to gain leverage on that bill?*

Hruska: "There may have been that in the picture; I wouldn't be prepared to say. I never discussed that with him. . . . I believe to the extent that Senator Dirksen said he was opposed to it, in that original form, I think he was sincere. I think it was a matter of conviction. I judge that somewhat by my own position, which was very close to his, and, of course, he was the ranking man on the Judiciary Committee that was processing the bill, and I was next ranking. And we worked together very, very closely on it; so I knew almost every move that was made from inception, from the introduction of the bill."

*Question: I take it that you think he was an effective leader.*

Hruska: "Yes, he was an effective leader. I believe because he had a deep and a universal sense of what the issues were. He was able to relate from his vast experience, his legislative experience, he was able to relate any given situation that

arose into its proper context. I believe he had, more than any other person I have worked as closely as I have with him, the ability to project the impact of a given legislative action into the future and what its actual workings and meaning would be when it was made into law. There's a difference between the intent and the objectives in the minds of the legislators of any given measure and the fashion in which it is being applied."

*Question: What kinds of things did he do to bring the party together?*

Hruska: ". . . he was able to suggest a sufficient change in the bill to attract the defending, and the support of those who were in outright opposition to it, and those who wanted something else, as opposed to those who wanted the original form. Sometimes that difference was quite tangible, sometimes it was radical, sometimes it was very nominal. And he was able to do that without betraying any principles, without watering the measure down to a point of meaninglessness, so in that way he was able to get people together."

*Question: What kinds of appeals did he make to convince senators to support him?*

Hruska: "Once in a while he would make appeals on a personal basis—not very often. I haven't known it to happen very often, but sometimes he did."

*Question: Did Dirksen's close relationship with President Johnson compromise his leadership?*

Hruska: "[After acknowledging the criticism] I do not believe it had affect except this: that he tried to cooperate with his president, and tried to enable his president, even though the president was from another party, in order to get the national job, the national leadership to a position where it could get its program going, where it could function, where he could be effective as president. And there're so many ways that could be done without abandoning one's own political convictions or policy convictions. He had a compassion for the presidency, I would say that, and its tremendous responsibility. I think that showed many, many times. But it is certainly to be preferred, in my judgement, to a constant arms-length negotiation between the minority leader and the president of another party. To do that would stultify both the presidency and the minority. And to be constantly scrapping with him just for the purpose of differing with him would be a bad thing. . . . Somewhere in between there—and being completely subservient to the president—is a middle ground. Of course, Senator Dirksen never hesitated to lay his proposition down on the table when he would go no further by way of concession. Then it would be fought out with respect . . . and deferentially, but nevertheless hard-hitting." [Gives a detailed example of how the respectful relationship between Dirksen and John F. Kennedy led to compromise on the Drug Reform Act of 1962]

*Question: It has been suggested that Dirksen was not as effective in his later years.*

Hruska: "You must take into consideration that there was some change in the composition of the Senate in the meantime. There were some new members added on the Republican side who had, in the first place, a philosophy different from that which had prevailed in general. They were of a more liberal, a more modern, if you want to say it that way, approach. . . . As these numbers increased, of course there were more and more voices saying, 'Well, he doesn't represent us.' And he didn't. He can't represent everybody. He is in the role of a leader. He has to cast around and find out just what is acceptable, what can be done. And go by that. Now, of course, the extreme, the more liberal, the more different the new arrivals were, they more they complained. I believe if it's analyzed in that way, it will be found to be based on that proposition rather than any loss of personal influence that he may have had."

*Question: Did Dirksen change his leadership style as younger and more liberal Republicans came to the Senate?*

Hruska: "Oh yes, as he realized what was happening with the new membership he was more tractable, more flexible, and sometimes went along with positions which, had he been left alone, he would not have assumed."

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## Jacob Javits (R-New York)



Jacob Koppel Javits (1904-1986)  
Senate Years of Service: 1957-1981  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000064>

*Question: Was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Javits: “I think we was an effective leader in the way that some leaders function here, which was in trying to bring different groups together and, in himself, representing a group, a kind of thinking and then endeavoring in his own person to compromise on behalf of that group. I thought he was singularly successful in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which I think was really the crowning moment of his whole career.”

*Question: Did Dirksen go way out to the right in order to gain a bargaining position on that bill?*

Javits: “It could be, with Everett Dirksen. He had that kind of mind—very clever. And he never made it show. Also, he did a great job on the Nonproliferation Treaty . . . and he had those moments, in his life . . . where the public interest overrode every consideration—personal and party—and he really deeply felt that this might be a monumental move toward rationalization of nuclear armaments. And he really did it. It could’t have been done without him.”

*Question: Did Dirksen work as well with liberals like yourself as with others?*

Javits: “No. Because he wasn’t as sympathetic with us. But I think he always gave us a fair break, where he had to deal with us, and in practically very case, he had to.”

*Question: How did Dirksen and Knowland compare?*

Javits: “Knowland was more a personal advocate, more a persuader of the country in the Senate than a tactical mover. Dirksen had more of the inside-the-club feeling . . . . And he was a big man, in a genuine sense. He had size in his outlook . . . . I liked Bill Knowland . . . his word was absolutely good . . . . He never would give you answers that might go both ways. Dirksen did, but that doesn’t mean—his word was perfectly good, but he didn’t give it.”

*Question: Was that [not giving his word] a deliberate tactic?*

Javits: “It was the need for leaving himself loose, as the saying goes. That’s the way he felt about (bills); he didn’t want to be latched in—Knowland, on the other hand, did.”

*Question: What was the impact of his close relationship with Democratic administrations?*

Javits: “I think it materially enhanced it [Dirksen’s effectiveness], and I think he was a much happier man and a much more influential figure in the country, and a much more important leader with a man in the White House he could work with, not a man in the White House where it was somewhat at arm’s length.”

*Question: Could he convert that influence in the Senate?*

Javits: “More often, influence for him than for Johnson. In other words, I think he got more from Johnson than Johnson got from him. And I think that was one of his real strengths here. I don’t think he enjoyed the relationship to President Nixon that he did to President Johnson. The intimacy there was very great. I think it was used to advantage rather than to disadvantage from the point of view of his role in the Senate.”

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## Len Jordan (R-Idaho)



Leonard Beck (Len) Jordan (1899-1983)

Senate Years of Service: 1962-1973

<http://bioquide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000269>

*Question: Is the Republican leadership more or less centralized now?*

Jordan: "I think probably it's more decentralized in form now because we've set up a system of various whips, assistant whips and so on that we didn't have designated under Dirksen. But the same general result was achieved without the format of particular assignments. It was done on an informal basis. So, a good two different ways to do it. I don't know that a new man could take over from Senator Dirksen without shrinking in comparison. Because of his many years of experience—the fact that he had been around so long and had a way of accommodation personally with new senators to old senators to senators of every persuasion. He could make the tent big enough to take us all in and, at the same time, he supported enough of the opposition party when he agreed with them. When he didn't, he put up a valiant and courageous fight. So, he operated altogether in a different climate than anyone could who would succeed him because he had the confidence of all of us . . . ."

*Question: How did Dirksen go about building a coalition to support something like the civil rights bill?*

Jordan: "Mutual respect. I've never known him, not with me, he's never told me, never asked for a vote. He's never said, 'I need your help.' I've listened to him talk, and he's always persuasive, and I haven't always gone with him but, and I would know, you wouldn't know that he was unhappy about it because he didn't tell you. But he was big enough to let you make up your own mind without duress and be happy when he had you, and probably less happy when he didn't have you, but he didn't let on."

*Question: What is required to be an effective leader?*

Jordan: “You have to have integrity first. . . . He’s got to be fair and above board and there won’t be any side deals and so on. And he’s got to be stimulating. He’s got to be a man of competence who commands respect by his background, his experience, by his ability to articulate the issues and to make you want to be with him. Everett Dirksen had all these things—and with it all he had a saving sense of humor, a charm and a grace. When things got tense and tight, he had a story that would relieve the tension. Some unfriendly press would ridicule him for it, but it was a very effective resource.”

*Question: Did Dirksen stake out positions tactically, knowing he would use his movement as leverage?*

Jordan: “I don’t know whether he did it by design or whether he approached an issue with an open mind. I rather think the latter is true. I think that it was not an affectation with him, when he went way out and then comes back. I think he honestly—like a lot of us are when we get into a subject and find that maybe your original ideas of it are replaced by better information as you [obtain], better facts, better background, as you explore a complicated matter. If you do it with an open mind, it’s quite possible you move, one way or another. He was that way and admitted it. He was not unafraid to say that ‘things look differently to me now.’ When he was confronted with ‘well you didn’t talk this way before . . . my information, my decision to go was based on the information I have, when I have better information I’ll be very delighted to change my mind.’ This was a saving grace, because if any of us are locked in, before we’ve even explored all the facts of [unclear], there’s no chance for growth, there’s no chance for rapport, or statesmanship or effectiveness really.”

*Question: Did Dirksen’s close relationship with Democratic administrations translate into influence in the Senate?*

Jordan: “Well, I don’t know. . . . I’ll put it this way, he was quick to come to the support of a senator whom he thought might be being run over, whether he had any effect in changing things or not, I don’t know, but I suspect in some instances he did.”

*Question: How did Dirksen try to get support?*

Jordan: “I just don’t know because he’s never tried to change my position. . . . I would tell him [that he couldn’t go along with Dirksen] but he never tried to persuade me against my position. Of course I’m an older kind of fella, and he probably knew that when I said that I had searched my soul and that was it. But he never tried to change me.”

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## Thomas Kuchel (R-California)



Thomas Henry Kuchel (1910-1994)  
Senate Years of Service: 1953-1969  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000335>

*Question: How did you and Dirksen see your job as a leadership team?*

Kuchel: “My relations with the late Everett Dirksen were excellent. I surely regarded him as a very great senator, a very great American, and a very great friend. And I believe I may truthfully say that he reciprocated the latter part of that assessment . . . . I think there was a loyalty between us. I can recall in some particular occasions when the point of view that I had to some issue was at some variance with Senator Dirksen’s. He never let that interfere with his judgement or with the manner in which we sought to be leaders for the minority.

“I think over the years, I saw Everett Dirksen grow in stature and become truly, in many areas, one of the great senators in our history.”

*Question: On the Civil Rights Act of 1964, did Dirksen stake out a position “way out” strategically?*

Kuchel: “I rather doubt that. I think that at first blush, and in the absence of any detailed study, he felt that the 1964 proposal was an invalid piece of legislation under the Constitution. I think as time went by, as he studied it, as he recalled the history of the Civil Rights Commission under Eisenhower—we used to talk about that—that he changed his opinion. I think it’s just that simple.”

*Question: What were the techniques of Dirksen’s leadership compared with Knowland?*

Kuchel: “. . . they were both hard workers. I think that business of Dirksen getting up at five or six in the morning and coming down to the Capitol was the truth. . . . They were hard workers, both of them. And sought to master the subject matter that they had in mind. Again I say, I think Bill Knowland’s views were more—well, he made up his mind and then it was difficult for him to change. That, to an extent, influenced the techniques he used in the Senate. He was loath to accept amendments. Dirksen, on the other hand, would, if he felt it would help the end product and wouldn’t hurt or damage his cause . . . .

“Both of them tried to discharge their responsibility by talking to Republican members. Dirksen would have his so-called “happy hour” if anyone wanted to drop by—late, six o’clock. Bill did that but not to the same extent. Both of them tried to make themselves available for meetings with members, and for appearances in the states of the members which, sometimes, became an important factor to the senator involved. Dirksen and Knowland, too, would try to sit down and break bread with the brothers several times a week, in the private Republican Senate dining room. So that little bit of camaraderie did exist on the part of each of them on those occasions.”

*Question: How did Dirksen use leadership resources?*

Kuchel: “Well, you know Dirksen was really very even-handed. And Dirksen was relatively free from grudges. He was not a man to go around hating people. He really was not. So, everyone got a pretty fair shake out of Dirksen.”

*Question: Do you recall instances when Dirksen called in his IOUs?*

Kuchel: “It seems to me the secret of Everett Dirksen’s success as a leader probably comes down to what people referred to as his mellifluous voice and the fact that he was the wizard of ooze. . . . Some people may have felt there was a little corn in it; it was great and people really—he had a very charming way about him and he did express himself very well and he moved votes in the Senate on crucial occasions simply by what he said and how he had to say it. And I’ve been there and seen it.”

*Question: How did Dirksen get someone to change his mind?*

Kuchel: “Just talk to him. He talked to me on occasion—sometimes I’d do it—sometimes I wouldn’t. He knew he couldn’t win them all. He was a fellow who would not seek to push another. There were some very crucial votes where he felt the country, and where he felt the party—it wasn’t anything personal to him—had to supply votes. I think I can recall one occasion where he did go to a Republican senator on a very controversial and important issue and say, ‘You have got to come along with me,’ and I think the fella did.”

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## Charles Mathias (R-Maryland)



Charles McCurdy (Mac) Mathias, Jr. (1922-2010)  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1987  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000241>

*Question: Was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Mathias: “Oh I don’t think there is any doubt that he was an effective leader. I think you might question, at moments, who he was leading (chuckle) but he was. I think the reason he was effective was because he was skillful in recognizing the orbit, perhaps not the orbit but the perimeters of an issue, and then recognizing those members of the Senate who fell within the perimeter. I think that as a matter of his personal philosophy, it was always a matter of cheer to him if people within that perimeter were Republicans. But if they weren’t, it didn’t make any difference; he still went out and collected them for the vote. He was not afraid to show his fangs if he had to. He could cajole and he could threaten. I was here long enough to know that, and I don’t criticize him for it. . . . I think he was a very good bookkeeper. . . . That your credits and deficits were always taken into account.”

*Question: Did he lose his effectiveness in the last couple of years?*

Mathias: “I think you have to recognize that his health was not good, that he was not a young man. As the years went on, his physical ability to engage in the eyeball to eyeball confrontations and all the kinds of physical activity that politics requires but which the public sometimes doesn’t really appreciate—hours and hours and hours of sometimes tedious conversation, the hand-holding, all of the personal contact. I think that he simply was not physically able to do that toward the later part of this life. And I think that, perhaps, the nature of his leadership altered as a result of it because there wasn’t the constant communication which everybody demands and not very many people get.

“But let me say that he was always accessible. He was always accessible to Republican members; he never held back. But I . . . have the feeling that in the prior years that he

probably was more able to take the initiative in communication and personal contact.”

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## Robert Packwood (R-Oregon)



Robert William Packwood (1932- )  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1995  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000009>

*Question: How effective was Dirksen as a leader?*

Packwood: "I only saw him for eight months, and at that time I thought he was a reasonable leader. But I sensed a diminishing physical power. And part of the job is energy, and he just didn't have it. I'm told though, by the other guys that'er around here, that he was, in his heyday, he was a pretty good leader."

*Question: As a freshman senator, did you go to him, or did he help you at all?*

Packwood: "No. He never came to me and I seldom bothered him. And I don't bother Hugh very much."

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## Charles Percy (R-Illinois)



Charles Harting Percy (1919-2011)  
Senate Years of Service: 1967-1985  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000222>

*Question: Describe Dirksen's style—how did he go about getting support?*

Percy: "Eloquence. And he was very well briefed on legislation. Sometimes I think he waged battles not to win them, like the prayer thing. He never called that to a vote, but it was the Dirksen prayer amendment. Now he worked hard on the one-man, one-vote amendment. He worked hard on that and on civil rights. He knew the legislative process and he loved it."

*Question: Was he an effective leader?*

Percy: "Yes, he was very effective. He was very skillful. He got along well with the president. He'd sometimes oppose the president, but he used to love to talk about how the president called me on this or this."

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## William Saxbe (R-Ohio)



William Bart Saxbe (1916-2010)  
Senate Years of Service: 1969-1974  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000096>

*Question: What are the sources of influence to help a minority leader do his job?*

Saxbe: “Well, really he should have a great deal more available to him than he does have, or at least he exercises. He can do small favors, afford recognition, but that’s about all. Senator Dirksen, when he was the minority leader—and I can only judge by what I saw after I arrived here—he had abandoned practically all power to the Policy Commission [sic]. He seemed to run his own show. Oh, he passed out junkets and things like that, but he didn’t try to exercise any great leadership and authority. This was astounding to me, and I attribute it to the fact that the Senate is an independent organization. They allow each man to go his independent way.”

*Question: You say he had abandoned his role to the Policy Committee?*

Saxbe: “If he ever had one—I don’t know. But he used to sit there and not talk, and Scott does the same thing. Instead of trying to ramrod the group, it’s pretty much of a soft-sell deal.”

*Question: Do you think Dirksen was an effective leader?*

Saxbe: “He had a strong personality, and he took strong positions which in itself is an invitation to people to follow. But you had the feeling that he was running his own show all the time. . . . He would change sometimes without any consultation . . . . I had the impression anyway, in the short time I was here, that it was a rather loosely hung organization. If you wanted to go along, fine. There was no great punishment if you didn’t and no great reward if you did.

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## Richard Schweiker (R-Pennsylvania)



Richard Schultz Schweiker (1926- )

Senate Years of Service: 1969-1981

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000159>

*Question: Was Dirksen effective? And as a freshman did he help you?*

Schweiker: "I just wasn't here long enough. But the older members . . . tell me he was very effective. He did extend a hand of welcome to freshmen senators, but it's hard to tell where that might have led. He opened channels of communication to new senators."

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## Hugh Scott (R-Pennsylvania)



Hugh Doggett Scott, Jr. (1900-1994)  
Senate Years of Service: 1959-1977  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000174>

NOTE: Senator Scott was elected Senate Minority Leader upon Senator Dirksen's death in September 1969.

*Question: Was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Scott: [After discussing at length the changes he had implemented for the Republican leadership] "Yes, I wasn't suggesting deficiencies in the Dirksen leadership so much as the fact that for a very long period of time the Republican leadership had always been conceived of as a one-man operation. All the way back to Bob Taft, who really gave it that aspect. There are always a growing and accumulating list of things which people think ought to be done in a different way and could be done better.

"I think that Dirksen's leadership was very good, but he was unique. And I think he was a good leader, but he had the strength and the peculiar artful way of persuasiveness where you could sustain one-man leadership, because he was unique . . . ."

*Question: Did Dirksen go "way out" on civil rights as a strategy for bargaining?*

Scott: "I don't know. I think it's a possibility. It was widely discussed at the time. I think that frequently Dirksen adopted rather suddenly a moderate or liberal position, but he did nearly always first sound off in very sonorous tones that were pleasing to the conservatives, first of all. Then, having protected that flank, perhaps he felt he had more freedom of action to do these things. Certainly the '64 and '65 civil rights and voting rights acts would not have been passed had it not been for the really superb leadership that Dirksen gave them."

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## Ted Stevens (R-Alaska)



Theodore Fulton (Ted) Stevens (1923-2010)

Senate Years of Service: 1968-2009

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000888>

*Question: Do you think the minority leader has a duty to represent the Senate to the president?*

Stevens: "It's a two-way street . . . Dirksen could fairly well go downtown or go on national television and say what the Republican position was going to be in the Senate because he could fairly well convince people of that, and if he couldn't convince them, I think he could fairly well twist some arms . . . But, I think he had a real position of strength."

*Question: What kinds of things can the leader do for you legislatively?*

Stevens: "Dirksen's greatest effectiveness, I think came about because he had served as a minority leader under a Republican administration and as minority leader under a Democratic administration and then he began at the opening of this administration. By the time Nixon came into office, I think Dirksen was the most formidable man on the floor that he [Nixon] had. I don't think that anyone had the total personal power on the floor that he had. . . . Dirksen's power across the aisle was as much of an asset to him as many of his own Republicans."

*Question: Does the ability to work across the aisle help Republicans?*

Stevens: "I think so. I think that we lost a great deal when we lost Ev because of this expertise that he developed. And he had a sense of timing that, again, came about

because of experience that would let him know when was the right time to try something to really get success as far as the minority position is concerned.

“The minority, when it comes right down to it, just doesn’t have the votes to accomplish anything. You have to have votes from across the aisle, and I think that Ev’s greatest power was an ability to convince people from the other side that a Republican position was really a national point of view, and they should support it. It’s an advocacy function more than anything else. In a procedural basis, obviously, “no,” he just doesn’t have the votes to accomplish anything. But he did use procedure more than any other senator for a period of time. He was able to convince others that even if they didn’t agree with him substantively, they could help him procedurally to accomplish a position. He was a real tactician, as far as I could see.”

*Question: Can you compare Dirksen’s leadership with Hugh Scott’s?*

Stevens: “No, I really can’t. I don’t think it’d be really fair to do because Scott hasn’t had [time] to build up the relationships that he needs. . . . Knowland never had the control and the ability to speak for Republicans, not only in the Senate but throughout the country, that Ev Dirksen developed by the time he got his ‘Ev and Charlie Shows.’ When Ev said something was the Republican position, it pretty well was. It either was or you were a renegade if you disagreed with him.”

*Question: Do you think that caused problems in the later years?*

Stevens: “No, I think by the time Ev got down to the last years of his life, he saw some new kids coming in who had not ever had contact with him in the national conventions or national committees and weren’t familiar with his background, and really were more of an agnostic group as far as the focus . . . . I always had a great feeling for the old man. I knew him when I was downtown, and I knew him what I was working up here right out of law school . . . .”

*Question: Did Dirksen’s relationship with Johnson hurt his position?*

Stevens: “I think it enhanced it, and I think at times Johnson helped him. . . . Dirksen had so much money in the bank, you might say, from years of cooperation the other way, that he could call on some of these people for help. Now Scott doesn’t have that ability . . . .”

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## John Tower (R-Texas)



John Goodwin Tower (1925-1991)  
Senate Years of Service: 1961-1985  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000322>

*Question: In contrast to Democrats, Republican leadership is more widely distributed. What is the effect on the strength of the floor leader?*

Tower: “Dirksen consolidated his power position as he went along. And was generally regarded by Democrats and Republicans alike as the single most powerful man in the Senate. I’ve heard many Democrats say that.”

*Question: In what ways was Dirksen an effective leader?*

Tower: “I think he was an extremely effective leader. . . . A tremendous parliamentary experience which he completely absorbed; strong personality; tremendous powers of persuasion; and superior ability in debate. . . . The capacity to command loyalty—very important—as well as the respect of his colleagues. . . . Everett did things for people. He would take the new boys under his wing. . . . He’d, from time to time, invite me back for a friendly, considerate chat with me. . . .”

*Question: How did Dirksen get things done?*

Tower: “Personal relationships and things he’d done for people on the other side of the aisle. Power builds on power. The more power you accumulate, the more you can ultimately hope to accumulate. And two, by virtue of his very good relationship with the majority leader. He could say, ‘Mike, could you do this for me,’ and sometimes Mike might reciprocate and ask Everett to do something for him. He was in a position to do this because sometimes the Administration wanted something that had to have a little minority party support for.”

*Question: On civil rights, did Dirksen go “way out” to the right as a bargaining ploy?*

Tower: “Now I’m sure that Everett did that sometimes, but I’m not sure that you could say on just which issue. He might have started from a position, let’s say, to the right and moved to the left, or vice versa. Although I know he did that sometimes, I think he actually changed his mind on some of them. On others, I think he played it coy for a while and then, when he moved, it was a significant move. I think that certainly his primary objective was to achieve the greatest possible impact—personal impact on legislation, firstly, and, secondly, that of the party. He loved to see the Dirksen stamp on everything that came out of the Senate.”

*Question: In the last years, did the “Dirksen stamp” represent only his views, and not the party’s?*

Tower: “No, I don’t think so because, generally speaking, Everett represented the ideas of a substantial number of us. I would be among those who, generally speaking, was in Everett’s corner. Sometimes we used to get very angry when we thought Everett’d pulled the rug out from under us. But for the most part, we loved him, and we trusted him, and we felt that, generally speaking, he was in our corner. So, he worked with everybody. It wasn’t just for Dirksen, but through Dirksen flowed the ideas and plans.”

*Question: Was there resentment in the last years?*

Tower: “No, those that expressed resentment were, generally speaking, those who were rarely with him anyway. They’d get up and say, ‘You know, we’ve got to do something about poor ‘ol Ev.’ Well, what the hell you propose to do? What’s wrong with poor ‘ol Everett’?”

*Question: How would Dirksen go about getting support on an issue?*

Tower: “He’d invite a few of the boys back in his office and have a few drinks, and talk about marigolds and such. On about the fourth drink, he’d come around to the issue. Course he pretty much knew who was where, and he didn’t go to Javits or Case. But he usually concentrated on the two or three who might be wavering.”

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**Frances Henderson, Administrative Assistant to Clifford Case (R-New Jersey)**

Senator Case and Administrative Assistant Henderson did not particularly like Dirksen, or agree with his leadership and positions, as this interview makes clear. But Henderson gives an example of the kind of favors Dirksen would do: “He did favors. I remember the first negro page. He let Javits appoint the first negro page. It was really Dirksen’s appointment but he let Javits have it.”

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**Michael Bernstein, Minority Counsel, House Education and Labor Committee:**

Bernstein previously served 12 years with the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Dirksen served on the committee in 1959.

Bernstein: “When a bill out of the Labor Committee was on the floor—when it was over, Dirksen always invited the staff people of the committee into his office for drinks. And it wasn’t just for a drink. We’d sit around and talk, usually other senators there. He was the most extraordinarily gracious man, thoughtful. I’ve never heard of anyone else ever doing that.”

Bernstein told the story that one day late in the day, with everyone getting tired, John Marshall Butler of Maryland, “who was a petulant fellow,” decided he’d make a motion to adjourn. That’s unprecedented because the majority always has the prerogative of moving to adjourn. But everyone knew Butler was going to offer that motion. In Bernstein’s word, “Well, and this is the only time I’ve ever seen Dirksen excited, and he was—upset. He came over and said, ‘John, don’t make that motion. Lyndon doesn’t want it. If you offer this motion, you know what will happen. You will erect a wall down this center aisle, between the parties, that will be unbridgeable.’” Butler refrained and Johnson adjourned the Senate 30 minutes later.