

Bill Goodwin

Answering Phones in the Democratic Cloakroom

Recollections of the duties of a House Page during the 1950s.

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I answered the phones. We had a battery of, I think, around 17 phones, if I remember correctly. They were all in phone booths, all lined along the wall in the cloakroom. Our job was to answer the phones, and the congressional offices would call and want to have a Page sent down to the document room, pick up documents, and take them over to the office, or have a Page sent to various offices, and run those type of errands. So we wrote it up on a pad, and brought it out to the head Page there behind the desk, and he would assign the runners—we called those “bench Pages.” And he’d sign the run to those boys.

That was pretty much my job and then also during the session when the House was in session, Congressmen’s offices and constituents would call, and they’d want to talk to the Congressmen. And so, we had to know the Members of Congress. We were given a book—a photo book—with their name and address, and their office number, and we had to memorize all of that information, and be able to spot the Congressmen very, very quickly. So we’ll walk up onto the back of the House, and look down across—all we could see was backs of Congressmen’s heads—and had to be able to spot the Congressman from that way. We got to the point where we were used to looking for a particular Congressman—he had his favorite seat—and we would usually find him in a particular general, generally located in one particular area. Quite often being on the Democratic side, the New York delegation, they liked to sit in a particular area, and the Alabama delegation, they liked to sit in another area. And so, I would go out there and say, “Congressman Jones, your office wants to speak to you.” Then escort him back there, and I would be back to the phone before he would get there, and our job was to do the courteous thing of handing him the phone because there’s 17 phone booths there; he didn’t know which one it was, and I’d make sure that he was ushered to that phone and hand him the phone and close the door.