

## Preface

An account in *The Hill*, on January 29, 2003, described Art Ryneerson's office on the sixth floor of the Dirksen Building as being dominated by a map of the world, hung behind his desk, along with pictures of China and his college and law degrees. It seemed an appropriate setting for a legislative drafting specialist who, in his own words, had his "fingerprints all through foreign relations legislation prepared in the last quarter century, including all the major treaties."

That year, when he retired after twenty-six years with the Office of Legislative Counsel, as Assistant Counsel, Senior Counsel, and Deputy Legislative Counsel, the Senate passed a resolution commending his exemplary service as "the primary drafter in the Senate of virtually all legislation relating to international relations, international security, immigration, and the State Department, and all matters relating to Senate consideration of international treaties."

The Office of Legislative Counsel dates back to 1919 when it was created to "aid in drafting public bills and resolutions or amendments thereto on request of any committee." Over time, the nonpartisan Office also provided drafting services for individual senators as well as for committees. By statute, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate appoints the Legislative Counsel "without reference to political affiliations and solely on the ground of fitness to perform the duties of the office." The Legislative Counsel then appoints the rest of the Office staff, with the approval of the President Pro Tempore.

The Office of Legislative Counsel adopted an "attorney-client relationship" to its work with Senators and committees, treating each request as a confidential matter. It was a strict rule that the attorneys had no role in the development of any legislative policy. They served solely to implement the policy desires of the Senator or committee requesting assistance, and to point out any potential constitutional problems with the proposed legislation.

To develop expertise, each attorney was assigned to a specific area of statutory law. With a lifelong personal interest in foreign relations and law school training in international legal affairs, Art Ryneerson was hired in 1976 to draft foreign policy-related legislation. He had been born in Caracas, Venezuela, on April 18, 1949, but had grown up in Yonkers, New York. In 1971 he graduated from Hamilton College, and for the next two years worked at

the Congressional Research Service. In 1976 he earned a law degree from the Cornell Law School and was admitted to the D.C. bar.

Senator Joseph Biden, who chaired the Foreign Relations Committee, described Art Rynearson as “a backstage participant in many historic foreign policy decisions of the Senate, assisting the Foreign Relations Committee to draft both legislation and resolutions of advice and consent to ratification of treaties. His actions were rarely recognized or noticed by the public, but his contributions were essential. Art’s job was to ensure that our legislation clearly expressed the intent of the committee and that it meshed properly with existing law. He accomplished that through marvelous attention to detail and a complete absence of partisanship.” Senator Biden added, “It is not overstatement to say that the Senate could not function without people like Art Rynearson. Every day—and many a night—he was there, unfailingly courteous and professional, ready to assist the committee’s members and staff to draft and refine legislation for consideration by the committee and the Senate.”

Senator Ted Stevens, the President Pro Tempore, commended Rynearson’s dedication and professionalism, and noted: “We all rely upon the attorneys in the office to provide legislative drafts to carry out our legislative policy.” Senator Robert C. Byrd, a former President Pro Tempore, added that Rynearson’s departure would “leave a void that is difficult to fill as he is truly a part of the institutional memory of the Senate.”

### **About the Interviewer:**

Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. He has published several articles on American political history and oral history, including "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard Press, 1980); *Heritage of Freedom: History of the United States* (Macmillan, 1985); *The Senate* (Chelsea House, 1988); and *The U.S. Constitution* (Chelsea House, 1989); *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991); *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford University Press, 2005); and edited the *Minutes of the U.S. Senate Democratic Conference, 1903-1964* (Government Printing Office, 1999). He also edits the Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series) (Government Printing Office, 1978-). A former president of the Oral History Association and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he

"Arthur J. Rynearson, Office of the Senate Legislative Counsel, 1976-2003," Oral History Interviews, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.

received OHMAR's Forrest Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.