

Howard E. Shuman

Legislative and Administrative Assistant
to Senators Paul Douglas and William Proxmire, 1955-1982

Preface

by Donald A. Ritchie

"I see politics as struggle and strife," Howard Shuman explained, echoing the view of Edward Corwin that the Constitution was "an invitation to struggle" between Congress and the presidency over foreign policy. For Shuman, the same sense of struggle pervaded all areas of Senate activity during his twenty-seven years on Capitol Hill. As legislative and administrative assistant to Senator [Paul Douglas](#) during the 1950s and '60s, Shuman helped carry the banner for civil rights, fought against oil and gas interests, and promoted the many other liberal issues on Senator Douglas' agenda. During the 1970s he continued the struggle while administrative assistant to Senator [William Proxmire](#), in support of "Truth in Lending" laws and in opposition to the SST. In that same vein, as a specialist in economic issues, through his associations with the Senate Appropriations, Banking, and Finance committees and Joint Economic Committee, he came to see the Congressional role in the federal budget less as a "process" and more like "a barroom brawl."

Shuman's appreciation of political struggle took shape in the Senate of the 1950s, when [Lyndon Johnson](#) prevailed as Majority Leader, [Richard Russell](#) led the powerful Southern Democratic bloc, and [Robert Kerr](#) dominated the Finance Committee. Against these giants, Paul Douglas rallied liberal forces, and during their battles, Howard Shuman served as Douglas' "strong right arm." "He was always on the side of the angels," Senator Douglas testified, "despising sham and pretense."

Although initially defeated, Douglas' allies steadily overcame the filibuster to enact the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Shuman labeled this protracted persistence a Seven-Year Principle: "It took seven years from the time you got a good idea and introduced it as legislation, until it passed. I saw that in the Civil Rights fights from '57 to '64. It took seven years for the Truth in Lending bill to finally make it. It took six, almost seven years for the Depressed Areas bill to make it. It took us that long to save the Indiana Dunes.... Most of the major legislation I worked on, that was new, forward looking, which started out heavily opposed and without a mandate, after seven years of convincing, of publicity, of talking, of arguing, of hearings, finally made it.... It took that much time, and that much effort, and that much struggle to come off. 'Struggle' is the word."

Howard Shuman came to the United States Senate from an educational background that reached from Illinois to Oxford. Born February 23, 1924 in Atwood, Illinois, he attended the University of Illinois before joining the U.S.

Navy during the Second World War. After training at the University of Michigan and Harvard University, he was sent to Pearl Harbor. After the war he returned to the University of Illinois to receive his bachelor's degree. From 1949 to 1952 he attended Oxford University, where he became only the third American elected president of the Oxford Union. While teaching in the economics department at the University of Illinois, he accepted an offer to join the staff of Senator Paul Douglas. He served as legislative assistant from 1955 until 1960, as administrative assistant from 1961 to 1966, and as executive director of the Douglas Commission on Urban Problems, from 1966 to 1968. In 1969, Shuman returned to the Senate staff as administrative assistant to Senator William Proxmire, a post he held until his retirement from the Senate in 1982.

In later years, Shuman has taught courses on Congress at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and at the National War College in Washington. He has written numerous articles about Congress, and is the author of *Politics and the Budget: The Struggle between the President and the Congress*. "It was his long experience with the federal budget here in the Senate which produced this remarkable book so full of insight and intuitive understanding," commented Senator William Proxmire. In this oral history he describes those experiences, and draws upon them to explain the workings of the United States Senate from the 1950s through the 1980s. Howard Shuman died in Alexandria, Virginia, on November 18, 2008.

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 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), *The U.S. Constitution* (Chelsea House, 1989), *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1991), and *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Government Printing Office). A former president of both the Oral History Association and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

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