

The original documents are located in Box 2, folder “Lay, Chris (Administrative Assistant to Steve Symms) - Interview, 9/19/77” of the A. James Reichley Interview Transcripts at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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Interview with Chris Lay, Administrative Assistant to Congressman Steve Symms
Sept. 19, 1977.

Symms' office is filled with right-wing conservatives tracks. ~~It is~~ It includes a motto with a quotation from Thomas Jefferson stating "I regard public debt as the greatest ^{of dangers} to be feared." It also displays a sign with the slogan, "Politicians and drunks not ~~to be~~ permitted on premises."

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Symms was held up in committee and therefore could not talk with me. I talked instead to Lay. Lay pointed out that Symms was one of the half-dozen or so Republican congressmen who had supported Ronald Reagan for the presidential nomination last year against Ford. He said that as far as he could see, Symms' relations with the administration had not suffered for that reason. He thought that Ford's relations with Congress were slightly better than Nixon's had been. Symms was never particularly close to Nixon, although he never came out for impeachment of Nixon. Lay said that Symms had supported Reagan because he felt ~~that~~ philosophically compatible with Reagan, and also because he thought that Reagan had a better chance to win in November than Ford ~~had~~. He thought that Reagan was a higher-type candidate than Ford would make. His area of ideological disagreement with Ford were mainly in the area of foreign policy. He was concerned about the progress of the SALT talks. He had some disagreement with Ford on the issue of the Panama Canal. He was concerned about China, although his position on China ^(was) that it would be all right to improve relations with The People's Republic of China as long as the status of Taiwan was not jeopardized. He had begun to develop concern, however, that Taiwan would be jeopardized by the policy that Ford was pursuing. Symms is the vice-chairman of the Republican study-committee in the House, a group of conservative Republican congressmen. ^(Chowder) It includes about 70 members. Unlike the ~~and~~ and Marching Society, it is not so much a social group as a policy making group.

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Its other members include Congressman Burgener, the chairman, and other leaders such as Phil Crane, Margery Holt, Barry Goldwater Jr. John Ashbrook is not so much involved, ^{tends} ~~he wishes~~ to stay more on the edge of the conservative movement in the House. The conservatives stick together quite well, Lay believes. They meet once a week and discuss issues. Sometimes they initiate plans on their own. They draw up legislation from time to time. Jack Kemp has introduced a job-creation bill which was to a great extent the product of the Study Committee. ^{MOSC} ~~members~~ ^{did} ~~not~~ support Reagan for the Presidency, but tended to remain neutral. Lay mentioned that one of the reasons why Symms felt ~~x~~ free to support Reagan is that Congressmen are no longer ^{so} dependent on the White House as they once were. ^P Lay was uncertain why Symms had voted against giving Ford the authority to raise the import ~~x~~ fees on oil in 1975. ^H He said that Idaho really has no serious gas shortage, that Symms has consistently taken the position that the solution to the energy problem is to deregulate. ^L He said that Symms views President Carter's program as chiefly a means to raise additional revenue, a way to find a new tax base for federal government and in that way deliver on Carter's promise to balance the federal budget by ~~the~~ 1981. ^P Lay said that he and Symms are concerned that the Republican party does not present a sufficiently clear conservative image. They feel that ^{with} ~~by~~ different Republicans representing different points of view the voters become confused and the image is obscured. On the other hand, Lay said that he was sure that Symms would not favor imposing greater party discipline on ~~how~~ House members because he would not want to return to the power of "King Caucus." I mentioned the fact that the conservatives might find themselves in the minority and would not then ~~want~~ want to be disciplined and Lay admitted that was ~~that~~ probably true. Lay said that he thinks the Republican National Committee should give more leadership, that it is too responsive to the congressional leadership, which is not the way it should be. ^H He thinks, "It is more like the tail wagging the dog" at the present time. The National Committee should

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really be the source of leadership and direction for the Republican party, after all, it is the national voice of the Republican Party. ^{Buck} Unfortunately he thinks that Bill ~~Bach~~ is paying too much attention at the present time to the leadership in Congress.

Lay mentioned as intellectuals from whom the conservative Republicans gain inspiration and ideas, with whom they meet, as Milton Friedman, Bill Buckley, Irvin Kristol and Richard Pipes. Pipes is an expert on Soviet strategic doctrine.

