



adele ferguson reports:

What Power Means In Legislative Circles

OLYMPIA—"My office is too noisy."
"See Tom Copeland."
"Our committee wants to use the house chambers."

"See Tom Copeland."
"We've got a parking problem."
"See Tom Copeland."

The man to see, obviously, for anything that has anything to do with the business end of running the House of Representatives is Tom Copeland.

He's the Walla Walla farmer—wealthy type—who wanted to be speaker of the house and lost out to Rep. Don Eldredge of Mount Vernon.

But he didn't just go down the tube.

Copeland wound up as administrative officer, and he's got an office as big if not bigger and fancier than Eldredge's. Which bothers Eldredge not one bit.

"We have a real good relationship and I'm just real tickled the way it's working out," Eldredge said. "After the election, all the problems of getting organized for the session came just when it was the busiest time of the year for me in my stationery business. Tom took over, they don't plant peas in November—and he's just done a fine job."

What Copeland does is serve as a sort of overseer to all the employes of the legislature, some 200 plus. He sees to it that this one gets a better typewriter, or that one's office has the ventilation improved. He negotiates with the senate for the house on matters of salary and parking and the like. He has help, of course, particularly from Asst.-Sgt.-at-Arms Gene Prince.

And he loves it.

"Me?" he says. "I'm happy just to be alive."

There is no doubt that he would rather have been speaker but he's still doing what he's a master at, and that's organizing.

He tours the House Office Building regularly, finding out what everybody's problems might be, like what to do about the drapes. They were made by prisoners in the state institutions and they are beautiful and modern looking but they are made of raw flax and they smell like it.

They also shed fibers all over the suits of the legislators.

And he has the problem of umbrellas to worry about—legislators don't always remember to bring theirs from home and the trek between buildings can be a wet one. He's got some loaners set up.

And he's got the problem of trying to hold on to the ashtrays. Some nice black plastic ones were made with House of Representatives on them and of the original 144, only 15 have escaped the souvenir hunters as of this writing.

Besides all that, Copeland serves on the rules, state government and labor and employment security committees.

"Everything that has anything to do with running the house other than presiding and chairing the rules committee, Tom can do and I think it's great," Eldredge says.

"Besides," said Eldredge, "The real joy in being speaker is not in the power or the staff or being able to rap the gavel on people. The real joy is that the speaker has his own private head in a corner of the office, and that is the ultimate in the legislature."