



adele ferguson reports:

Some Have Misjudged Speaker Don Eldridge

OLYMPIA—House Speaker Don Eldridge has fooled a lot of people this session—he's a lot tougher than they thought he was going to be.

And he's going to fool a lot more before it's over.

It's no secret that Eldridge does not have the power in running the House that previous speakers have had.

The House is run by one Daniel Jackson Evans by remote control through Rep. Slade Gorton, GOP floor leader.

At least that's the way it was supposed to be back at the beginning.

But somehow they can't get around the fact that it's Eldridge's hand on the gavel.

And those have seen some rather startled looks on Gorton's face the few times that Eldridge even gaveled him down lately for speaking over the time limit that was set.

Eldridge can get mad and if he gets mad enough, all hell is liable to break loose up there on that rostrum.

He was the one picked by the Evans people to challenge Rep. Thomas Copeland for the speakership but he's not any lap dog.

He's a tremendous master of ceremonies at dinners, and holds things together very well and keeps programs running smoothly, which undoubtedly helped him in taking over the difficult job of speaker.

I remember a Good Roads Association dinner one time in Bellingham, where Eldridge had the tiring job of introduc-

ing every district engineer and scores of dignitaries.

He took care of it neatly. We're only going to give one clap per introduction, he said, and he had his audience practice a couple of times. Then bang, bang, bang, he slammed through the introductions, punctuated each time by a loud CLAP from the audience and finished in record time.

It was great and the audience just exploded when he was through.

He's pretty independent, too — the state patrol found that out when an officer called on him at the start of the session to ask about a car and driver being assigned to him.

Not me, said Eldridge, I thought they needed the patrolmen out on the highways. He declined.

He's got a short fuse, though, and he's come close to losing his cool.

Whether he can hang on during the special session I don't know, but what do you want to bet he's going to be really running that show before it's over with? And the Republicans can use all the help they can get.

Whether he can hang on during the special session I don't know, and I don't know how long he is going to like being treated as a figurehead.

The Democrats joke about it—"we like your speaker," one told some Republicans. "He's always fair and explains everything to us. What we don't like is his presiding officer."

It's beginning to look like Eldridge doesn't like it, either.