
Charles Brown, a Democrat representing the first district of Pennsylvania, refused to support a resolution thanking the retiring Speaker for his service. In the previous round of committee assignments, Brown had been taken off a panel with jurisdiction of direct relevance to his constituents and placed on another with little to none. Explaining his breach of decorum, Brown told the House that the people he represented "had interests, and they had a fight in some way or other to have them represented in this House" (Congressional Globe, Washington DC, 1843). In his view, his committees were central in fulfilling that responsibility. Perhaps in retribution, next time, Brown got no assignment at all.

It was 1843, more than a century before Committee Assignment Politics begins. I offer this story, despite the disparate eras, to...