

POLITICO

The Chairmen Levin

By: Jake Sherman

March 4, 2010

The Levin brothers of Michigan made history this week.

Newly minted Ways and Means Chairman Sandy Levin (D-Mich.) and his brother, Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.), became only the fifth pair of brothers to serve as committee chairs at the same time, according to a report by the Office of the House Historian.

It's only the second time ever that brothers have served as chairs in different bodies – the last time was from 1817-1823, when Sen. John Williams of Tennessee chaired the committee on military affairs and Rep. Lewis Williams of North Carolina chaired the committee on claims.

Other brother pairs: from 1879-1882 Rep. Robert Vance of North Carolina was the chair of the committee on patents and Rep. Zebulon Vance of North Carolina chaired the committee on enrolled bills.

Rep. Elihu Washburn of Illinois was chair of the commerce committee while his sibling Israel of Maine chaired the elections committee from 1855-1857. Elihu was chair of the commerce committee also when his brother Cadwallader of Wisconsin chaired the committee on private land claims.

The Washburn family had seven brothers in public service: including Cadwallader, Elihu, Israel, Rep. Charles Washburn (Mass.) and Sen. William Washburn (Minn.). But the Levin family of Michigan is also deeply enmeshed in public service. Sandy's son Andy was a candidate for a state senate seat, a cousin Charles was a Michigan judge and an uncle called Theodore was a federal judge in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The historian's report also highlighted another rare occurrence that happened with Levin's ascension to the chair of the tax-writing committee: both the top Republican and the top Democrat on the committee are from the same state. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.) is the committee's top Republican.

That's only happened three times before. From 1881-1883 William Kelley and Samuel Randall headed the Ways and Means committee. Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) had Vic Fazio (D-Calif.) as his ranking member on the House Oversight committee. And from 1999-2003, Chairman Larry Combest (R-Texas) and Charles Stenholm (D-Texas) ran the Agriculture committee, according to the historian's report.