



## About Those Side Pockets on a Cow

*Paul Bedard*

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Rep. **John Dingell** isn't just the third-longest-serving House member ever, passing the 50-year mark last week at a Hill lunch to celebrate his 1955 election to replace his father. He's also one of the few who can break up the dreadful bureaucracy-speak with folksy sayings like "That's about as useful as side pockets on a cow" and "Madder than a boiled owl." Dingell, 79, tells our congressional correspondent Danielle Knight that the use of "Dingellisms" goes back to his father. "I learned a lot from my dad," he says. "Dad was a very colorful fella."

Let's be clear: Dingellisms are not like "Dingellgrams," the famously harsh, sometimes belligerent notes to agencies the congressman is angry with. Instead, Dingellisms are quirky, off-the-cuff comments that are rich with meaning. Take the one that sizes up bipartisanship: "My pappy used to say," explains Dingell, that "when they say they want to be bipartisan, it means they don't have the votes." Ex-aide **Dennis Fitzgibbons** says Dingell trolls histories for some of his phrases. "A lot of them come from his reading," says Fitzgibbons. And some, he adds, come from Dingell's favorite Gilbert and Sullivan plays. Others Dingell just blurts out. Our faves: "There is no substitute for a public hanging" and "He's so crooked, they will have to screw into the ground," a comment Dingell made after one such politician had just died.

*With David E. Kaplan*

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