

Irving Swanson

The Speaker's Gavel

Background on the gavel used during the House proceedings that led to the declaration of war against Germany and Italy on December 11, 1941.

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Well, I kept the Speaker's gavel, presiding officer, of course, the House of Representatives, in my desk, which is the legislative desk of the House. And, Mr. Rayburn, who was the Speaker, used the gavel. And, as you know, President Roosevelt came down to declare war against Japan and we did. And, I called the roll and took the vote and I think it was two days later, we declared war on Germany and Italy. And, the President did not come down to the chambers of Congress. And, I acted as proxy for the President and read his message asking for the declaration of war against Germany and Italy, and of course, I took the vote again on that. Well, after that, Speaker Rayburn, who I worked intimately with and I was all alone at that time because the other two people that were involved in my work were one was dying of cancer and the other was in his 90s, so I had to handle the whole thing and it was a terrific job with 435 people out there. And, so, the Speaker said, "Well, he said, "You know, this is a momentous thing," and he said, "Would you like this gavel?" And I said, "Only," I said, "If you would sign it." And, of course, he signed it and dated it and everything.