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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE FROM YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER - 6th District, New Jersey



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Thursday, January 18, 1962

We live in an era when every year becomes successively more critical for the freedom and well-being of mankind. Our judgment, courage and capacity to direct the affairs of men and nations along peaceful and constructive paths are constantly challenged and complicated by our advancing technology, growing populations, our increasing power to destroy and the stresses and strains and hopes and fears that surround us everyday.

This, in brief, is the world environment in which Congress and the President meet again in Washington to continue the work of the 87th Congress and to reach joint decisions which affect not only the security and welfare of our own people but have a decisive impact on every corner of the world.

There is no longer any question about the American people's understanding of our country's deep involvement with the rest of the world. During the weeks between the adjournment of the first session of the Congress and the convening of its second session last week, in discussions with thousands of my constituents -- many of you among them -- it became very evident that questions of foreign policy are uppermost in our minds.

What People are Thinking

Are we psychologically prepared for and militarily capable of defending our position in Berlin? Should we begin again the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons? How important is it to go ahead with the private and public fallout shelter construction program? These three questions, all related directly to our cold war position, were the ones most frequently asked. Add to them the concern expressed about the Congo situation, the future of the United Nations, the communist aggression in Laos and Viet Nam, the implications of the European Common Market, Castro and the position of communism in Latin America, and the possibility emerges that once again the people may be ahead of the politicians in seeing what is really important.

Significantly, the mood and atmosphere of Washington at the outset of the new session bear little resemblance to the setting a year ago. Gone are the sense of great expectations, the bustle, bounce and buoyancy of a new Administration, the hyperawareness of change and newness. Instead, Washington is a more sober place today, and this may be a healthy sign.

There is a new respect here for the complicated quality of the problems and opportunities we face. The Kennedy Administration recognizes, I believe, that it has more in common with the former Eisenhower Administration than it once was willing to concede. There is a new understanding of the continuing nature of the great issues of foreign and domestic policy, an acceptance of the fact that there are few simple answers or ready-made solutions.

The first days of a new session are chiefly ceremonial and organizational. Congress and the Administration are feeling each other out. Reports of the thinking "back home" are exchanged. Pressures and counter-pressures are stepped up from all directions to win a favorable position for pet projects. And the President's State of the Union message, along with Congressional reaction to it, provide the first broad outlines of what the months ahead are likely to bring.

A Revealing Week

The past week has been especially revealing. The President's message was his usual stylistic masterpiece. As a catalog of the needs and hopes and problems of the country, it was impressive. Its generalizations could not readily be disagreed with. Yet, as the friendly New York Times pointed out, there was something missing. The Times concluded:

"We need more wisdom than we ever used before, more courage, more initiative, a greater sense of destiny. These qualities were not conspicuously absent yesterday, but neither were they conspicuously present."

Putting together the bits and pieces of opening-week impressions, this is the way it looks to me. There is still no central focus to Administration plans, no overriding sense of purpose, no apparent commitment to a set of priorities. Too many projects and programs are competing for support. Among the casualties, however, are education and civil rights. Administration and Congressional leaders seem unwilling to press for significant legislation in either field, for the risks of party-splitting fights would be great.

The fate of a major part of the Administration's program will rest this year in the hands of just one committee, the House Ways and Means Committee. Traditionally, this has been a cautious, conservative group of men, and when they finally act their recommendations nearly always become law. On tax reform, foreign trade and medical care for the elderly, however, there is more than the usual amount of controversy. In what precise form these measures will come from the committee--assuming they all are reported--is impossible to predict. But there are bound to be changes made to the Administration proposals.

Tribute to Bob Crane

The reconvening of the Federal Congress was preceded by one day by the reconvening of the New Jersey State legislature. As a mark of our friendship and respect for Union County's Senator Robert C. Crane, Senator Case and I stopped off in Trenton to watch him sworn in as President of the Senate and acting Governor of New Jersey. A good friend, an honorable man and one of the most effective legislators our State has had, Bob Crane thoroughly deserved the tribute his colleagues paid him.

Visiting the State Capital has become for me a rare and valued opportunity to renew the many friendships of my seven years as a Member of the State Assembly. It is also a useful reminder of how much State and Federal governments have in common these days. Few if any major decisions can be made by either level of government without careful consideration of their effects on the other. This is the age, one might say, of intergovernmental relations.

Since this is the first of my bi-weekly Reports to the People for the new session, I want again to invite your comments and criticisms. I shall welcome, too, the names of others in Union County who would like to receive this newsletter regularly -- Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike.

As the new session begins, please remember that I am here to represent and to serve you. While the votes I cast must be my own, I need your views, your ideas and your suggestions. If you will tell me what you think and let me know whenever I can help, I promise you I'll do my best.