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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE FROM YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN

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It hardly seemed like a beginning at all, on Tuesday of last week, when the second -- and election-oriented -- session of the 88th Congress convened.

There was little that was new. The problems, the politics, and the personalities had not changed in the short time since the grey dawn of the day before Christmas when we faced each other across the battle lines of foreign aid. Presidential politics were still with us and cast even broader shadows over the assemblage. The problems facing the country and the policies proposed to deal with them were the well-known and still controversial ones, though President Johnson set them in an intriguingly new mold. And there was the President, already the familiar occupant of the world's most powerful office, standing before us confirming in his first State of the Union address what he had promised just six weeks before in this same forum, that he would "translate into effective action" the ideas and ideals of his predecessor.

On the other hand, there is always change. And it was in the person of the President -- the southern-western manner, the lanky figure, the distinctive voice which reveals the odd combination of cowboy earthiness and sophisticated shrewdness -- that the paradox of change and continuity was strikingly illustrated. Lyndon Johnson, the legislative technician and political master of Capitol Hill, was now adopting as his own a program on which many of his old colleagues had previously gagged. And in the process, much as both the man and the program remained essentially the same, both were beginning to take on new features and a distinctive appearance.

THE CHANGE FROM JFK TO LBJ

The President's State of the Union message reflected this subtle transition. As I listened to this address -- a very effective one, politically -- and then read it again and thought about it, these three important changes became evident:

*A greater insistence on priorities. President Johnson has, in effect, reshaped his inherited program by putting first things first, by indicating some order of importance among the numerous and varied programs recommended by President Kennedy.

*A greater emphasis on economy and efficiency. Whereas President Kennedy placed greater stress on new ideas, unmet needs, and a "new frontier" of available opportunities, all involving Federal action of some kind, his successor has emphasized the limits of Federal resources and the need to hold the line on Federal spending by increasing the efficiency of Government operations.

*A more urgent demand for action. Secure, perhaps, in the confidence born of years of legislative leadership, President Johnson has cast aside what many critics saw as President Kennedy's too-cautious approach to Congress. He has insisted that his program be voted on as soon as possible, either yes or no, and has gone so far as to suggest specific time-tables for the tax reduction and civil rights bills.

In each of these changes can be seen President Johnson's highly sensitive understanding of the moods of Congress and the people. To this extent, he seems to have reacted positively to the criticisms many of us here had directed to the previous Administration and its Congressional leadership. Whether anything better will come of this remains to be seen. President Johnson's skill, determination, and good judgment will be tested severely in the months ahead -- as it should be -- by a Congress which will not play dead but which will continue to be careful and critical.

A TIME TO ACT

Certainly, however, the President's program demands attention and consideration. However much individual Members of Congress may disagree with the specifics, one must concede that the President has identified many of the real needs of America-- for protection of civil rights, for a reduction of taxes and the added jobs this should create, for better housing and transportation, for a broad-scale attack on the scandal of poverty in the midst of abundance, and for a workable way of providing better health care for more of our older people.

There are, and should be, differences among us as to how best to achieve these objectives. The President will have to demonstrate that his way of doing things is superior to others and he must show that these needs can be met effectively and responsibly within the limits of our national resources. This is his big test.

As important as our domestic problems are and as much of the President's time and effort as they demand, our new Chief Executive has been forcefully reminded, for the first time in his Administration, that the United States cannot ignore the rest of the world, even for a moment.

Whatever happens in the aftermath of the explosion in Panama, and however widely the blame may be shared, our own part in this tragedy has hurt us badly. We have known for a long time the nature of the danger there, yet we were unprepared to handle the outburst when it came. We had no Ambassador there. Our other officials could not even prevent their own people from violating the agreement with Panama governing the flying of flags, the prelude to the rioting. Our two big objectives in the area -- the security of the Panama Canal and the success of the Alliance for Progress-- have been compromised, and now we must begin the tedious but vital process of repairing the shaky structure of U.S.-Latin American relations. It's an expensive lesson to learn.

THE REFORM OF FOREIGN AID

In a related area, there is reason to hope the new Administration has learned another expensive lesson: that Congress does not like the way in which the foreign aid program has been administered and will not be satisfied with anything less than a major overhaul. In the aftermath of the bitter, pre-Christmas fight over foreign aid, therefore, these Administration developments are welcome concessions to the soundness of positions some of us have been urging:

*The appointment by the President of a high-level Government committee to review foreign aid and recommend specific ways to reduce spending and improve the effectiveness of the program -- a tacit admission that reforms proposed by the Clay Committee have not in fact been implemented.

*The announcement by the Administration that because of available funds from previous appropriations foreign aid spending this year could continue at roughly existing levels -- which amounts to agreeing that Congress' cut in foreign aid funds from \$4.5 billion to \$3 billion did not "cripple" the program.

*The news that the first big sale of wheat to the Soviet Union was concluded by private American grain dealers and approved by the Administration on an entirely cash basis -- testimony to the fact that our position opposing the use of Export-Import Bank credit to finance the deal would not necessarily have prevented its consummation.

None of these developments made headlines, but they provide encouraging evidence that our positions on these issues were reasonable and responsible ones.

(Note: With this first issue of my 8th year of "Report to the People" goes my warmest invitation, through you, to any of your friends or neighbors who might like to receive the report regularly. Just send me their names and addresses and I shall be happy to add them to my mailing list.)