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Florence P. Dwyer

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CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE UNION-ESSEX SUBURBS



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GOODBYE

The time has come to write the last of these regular reports to you, my constituents, to close my offices in Washington and Plainfield, and to return to private life.

Last spring, when I made the decision to retire, I did so as coolly, detachedly and intellectually as possible (though not without some pain), weighing the factors, resolving the doubts, and reaching the conclusion. But now the time has come, the personal and emotional aspects seem uppermost. How do I say farewell, for instance, to tens of thousands of wonderful people with whom I've been privileged to carry on this dialogue about our public business month after month for 16 years?

In brief, it's hard to say goodbye.

Since I know of no formula for submitting this final report on my stewardship, I shall keep it as simple and straightforward as possible -- summarizing some of the highlights, noting some of the disappointments, and concluding with a few observations on the future of what is still our national experiment in self-government.

But first, a word of thanks to each and every one of you -- you whom I have represented at the seat of government, my colleagues in the Congress and friends, past and present, in the Executive Branch, my loyal and hard-working staff, and those who have covered my activities for the press, radio and television. Collectively, it was you who made this tour of duty possible and you have made it, for me, the most rewarding experience a person could ever hope to have. Your friendship, kindness, generosity, understanding and support -- it's been all of these and more -- will never be forgotten.

THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

In approaching the job you gave me, the personal element has been primary, both in the service and the legislative functions of the office, because I have always believed that the ultimate test of government at all levels is whether it serves people with needs and interests and problems. One has got to care, and it has been in the caring that I have found the greatest challenge.

There has always been plenty to care about: the poor, the sick, the disabled and the jobless; older people needing housing, medical care or a supplement to their meager income; young people seeking educational opportunities; businessmen asking advice about Government contracts and local officials wanting help with Government grants; families trying to be reunited with relatives abroad; problems with passports, Social Security, unemployment compensation; servicemen, veterans, housewives, students, all seeking help or information of a thousand different kinds.

We haven't always been successful, but we've always tried to help -- and been enriched in the trying.

On the legislative end of things, if I were asked to name the one effort I'm proudest to have made it would be the fight in late 1960-early 1961 in which six Republican colleagues and I joined to prevent a conservative coalition in the House from blocking in the Rules Committee President Kennedy's legislative program even before it was sent to Congress. We won that fight which resulted in reform of the Rules Committee, by the narrowest of margins, and permitted the House to consider and work its will on some of the most important legislation in history.

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Other career highlights would include: passage of the First Class Transportation demonstration program, for which I was the chief House sponsor, and subsequent expansions of the program which is now beginning to show substantial results; the ending of the costly and unjustified system of special "exemptions" (subsidies for non-qualifying projects) in housing legislation which saved taxpayers the first year alone an estimated \$750 million; the deciding vote I cast in subcommittee for the Freedom of Information Act which broke a stalemate of several years; creation of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, the quietly effective agency which helped to bring the "New Federalism" to reality; my years of work for consumer protection especially in such areas as drug safety, consumer credit, and product safety; our long-term struggle for women's rights especially my role in the Equal Pay for Women Act, the Equal Rights Amendment and the President's Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities; and my sponsorship of the highly successful housing for the elderly program.

A RENEWED COMMITMENT

Many of my legislative activities, of course, have been continuing in nature and among these I have devoted special interest and attention to civil rights, environmental protection, housing and urban development, Congressional reform, Executive Branch reorganization, drug abuse control, election finance, ethics in Government, and prison reform -- all of which deserve renewed and strengthened commitment on the part of future Congresses. The welfare of the country requires it.

Closer to home, four areas of concern have given me special satisfaction: working with the City of Plainfield in a redevelopment program that has attracted national attention; obtaining authority and funds for the Elizabeth River flood control project, which is now in actual construction, and for the Rahway River flood control project, now nearing completion of the study phase; and participating in the development of Port Elizabeth and Port Newark which has brought thousands of jobs and tens of millions in income to the area.

There have been disappointments, too, in my 16 years on Capitol Hill. And surpassing all of them has been our tragic failure to end the war in Vietnam, a failure now compounded by what the Pentagon concedes has been the most destructive bombing campaign in the history of warfare. By any standard, moral or pragmatic, the bombing seems to me to be totally without justification. Coming at a time when we've virtually withdrawn from Vietnam and when we contend that the South Vietnamese are now able to defend themselves, it seems wholly counter-productive: disrupting negotiations, stiffening North Vietnam's resolve, increasing the involvement of Soviet Russia and Communist China, increasing the number of POW's rather than hastening their release, and exposing us to the moral condemnation of the world.

Perhaps more than any previous decision of the war, this bombing offensive dramatizes both the brutality and the futility of the U. S. role in Southeast Asia. No benefit could possibly outweigh the human and moral and economic costs.

By this standard, other disappointments look almost trivial. But they are, nonetheless, real. The last minute failure of this Congress to complete action on our Consumer Agency bill and the opposition of entrenched House committee chairmen which killed the President's reorganization proposals this year not only represent the loss of important and constructive legislation but they also reflect tactical or procedural failures, failures of the system. Neither defeat was necessary for I believe potential majorities existed for both bills. Losing on the merits is one thing; losing because the legislative process is not working properly is doubly regrettable.

TO THE FUTURE

Which leads me, finally, to the future. If it's possible to distill nearly a generation of legislative experience into a single conviction, it would be this: the need for reform, reform as a continuing process rather than an occasional response to crisis.

As a general principle, I am a believer in tuning and tinkering as opposed to more drastic surgery in the effort to reform and reshape one government. To be adequate, however, marginal and incremental changes (tuning) must be applied as soon as the need is recognized, which, in turn, requires continuing study and evaluation of the Government's structure and procedures.

The key to success wherever reform is needed -- campaign finance, Congressional procedures, taxes, Federal program management, prisons, etc. -- lies in making reform more systematic, a regularized, high-priority activity. And as reform succeeds, so will our great experiment in self-government -- government that will respond to needs, reflect citizens' values, and deserve the people's respect.

My one hope is that I've helped move us a little closer to that objective.