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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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Thursday, March 30, 1972

## THE VIEW FROM WALTER REED

Walter Reed is a hospital -- an Army General Hospital -- indeed, the headquarters, in effect, of military medicine. It's an old and sprawling institution, occupying several city blocks near the northern edge of Washington just below Silver Spring, Md. It sits on one of the high points of the D.C. landscape and sometimes you can almost see all the way across the city to that other elevation, Capitol Hill.

At least, it's easy to imagine that I can. For I am here at Walter Reed though my thoughts are very much in residence on the other "Hill." A broken upper arm -- the result of a rather silly fall when I got out of bed, sleepily, in the middle of the night -- accounts for my hospitalization which I'm hopeful will soon be over.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Walter Reed is one of two hospitals in the Washington area (the Bethesda Naval Hospital is the other) to which most Congressional patients are referred for injury or illness. The facilities are excellent and the care first-rate, though hospitals under the best of conditions are frustrating places in which to be stuck.

Given the phone, however, a voluminous supply of mail and other reading matter, and daily visits from staff members and friends, I've been able to stay in touch and keep things moving. Fortunately, too, the legislative schedule on the House Floor has been relatively light during this period, with few major votes and none so close that my position could have chanted the result. And by the time you read this, Congress will be off on its annual Easter recess, from March 30 to April 10, following which I expect to be ready for more action.

So, if it had to happen, the broken arm came along at a fairly propitious time. And it's had some other positive effects, too: a chance for a real rest, a little less tension and pressure, an opportunity to think more deeply and look at public events with a little more detachment. But the most immediate impact of my stay here has been something quite far removed from policy or politics.

## THE WAY IT IS

Two or three times a day, I leave my room and go to a central, gymnasium-like hall for physical therapy, exercises designed to keep my arm from stiffening, to prevent adhesions from forming, and to speed the knitting of the broken bone. But I'm only one of the patients receiving therapy here and it's pretty hard to keep my mind on my own trivial trouble when I look around the hall. Dozens of others are here, mostly young men, mostly veterans of Vietnam, missing an arm or a leg or sometimes both, trying their cheerful and determined best to master the lifeless hands and feet with which they've been equipped.

It's their spirit that does me in. They smile and laugh and joke with each other, and with me -- almost as though oblivious to their crippling wounds. And it isn't fake or phoney; it's clearly real. These young men, who have given up so much of what they had in a war they couldn't have been very optimistic about, have simply convinced themselves that there's no point in self-pity, no future in regretting the past, no hope in giving up.

What an example for the rest of us!

## BACK ON THE HILL

At the opposite end of the city, Congress, too, has been doing some worthwhile things (it's useful to remember that personal courage and determination reveal themselves in varied shapes and forms). This past week, for instance, the Senate in a burst of decisiveness soundly defeated crippling amendments and by a lopsided vote of 84 to 8 approved and sent to the States for ratification the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution.

After 49 years -- and after the House twice in two years, 1970 and 1971, had approved overwhelmingly the amendment -- finally, the Senate acted, pushing aside its doubts and responding to the increasingly persistent demands of women themselves.

Make no mistake about it, women themselves won this victory, supported happily, by the growing awareness of the press, the politicians and the legal profession that their cause was just. In the past two years, women's political progress has been impressive: more and bigger organizations, more outspoken and sophisticated leadership, an ever-broadening awareness by otherwise non-political women of how they're hurt by discrimination. This has made the difference.

## NOT QUITE YET

In the first two days following the Senate's action, no less than six State's ratified the women's rights amendment -- Hawaii, Delaware, New Hampshire, Nebraska, Iowa and Idaho -- and in at least one other State, Maryland, one of the two houses of the legislature had approved it. If this rate continues, the required three-fourths of the States will have ratified the prospective 27th Amendment in record time, somewhat less than the present record of 99 days in the case of last year's 26th Amendment lowering the voting age to 18.

Nevertheless, the amendment does not take effect until two years after ratification.

In other actions, the House has passed legislation significantly strengthening the protection of ocean mammals (though the bill itself needs further strengthening in the Senate). The bill broadening the authority of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has been sent to the President for signing into law. The House has approved legislation improving vocational rehabilitation programs and authorizing new programs for the severely handicapped. And both houses have passed, and the President signed, the bill to create the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention, from which we expect a major contribution in the fight against drugs.

I should note that, in each case, I have actively supported these measures at every opportunity.

## COMING UP

Though the results may be farther down the 'pike, I want at least to mention two series of hearings which have begun since I've been incapacitated -- both of which are being conducted by subcommittees to which I belong and which I've been able to follow through the daily statements of witnesses. Each could lead to uncommonly important legislation.

I refer, first, to the comprehensive review of the Consumer Credit Protection Act of 1968, in the enactment of which, you may remember, I was quite instrumental. This is the law which makes interest rates understandable, protects credit card holders from excessive liability for loss or theft of their cards, subjects loan-sharking to criminal prosecution, restricts the use of garnishment in debt collections, and assures consumers access to their credit information files.

Second is the equally broad review of Government information and classification practices, especially the operation of the Freedom of Information Act, being conducted by one of my Government Operations subcommittees. My first official act as ranking minority member of this committee was casting the deciding vote in favor of the Freedom of Information Act after a years-long stalemate, so I am obviously interested in the results we're getting from it.

In both cases, we want to see what more might need to be done.