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CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE UNION-ESSEX SUBURBS



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SPRING IN WASHINGTON: "TURMULT" AND CHANGE

We keep expecting it all to end in the only way it can: in the sudden and premature oncoming of oppressive heat. But Spring lingers on -- delightfully, even luxuriously -- the most pleasant and prolonged and refreshing stretch of weather I can remember in my 15 Washington Springtimes.

In sharp contrast -- almost as though in revolt against so much peace and beauty -- the political climate here has been full of turmoil and tumult, or "turmult" as one of my secretaries persisted in spelling it (thereby creating a fittingly expressive term).

It has shown itself in many forms and forums: the unexpected thaw (too early and superficial, yet, to assess) in U.S.-Communist China relations; the continuing controversy over the role and operations of the F.B.I.; the debate over extension of the draft (I voted to limit it to a single year); the unanimous Supreme Court decision upholding the use of busing to desegregate Southern public schools; the sudden discovery that the new national railroad passenger system ("Amtrak") may result in sacrificing more passenger service than it saves; the series of demonstrations against the war ranging from the new dimension of protest provided by Vietnam veterans themselves, through the remarkably quiet and orderly testimonial a week ago of 400,000 Americans (many demonstrating for the first time), to the currently more disruptive -- and counter-productive -- protests of a relatively small group of militants; and accompanying it all (inevitably, perhaps), the somewhat frantic efforts of a larger-than-usual number of presidential aspirants who are striving to stay in touch with, or on top of, but not too far in front of these and other rapidly shifting issues.

DESERVES MORE ATTENTION

There have been other sources of political tumult here, too, and some which should have been -- in which latter category I include what to me is the extraordinary proposal to build a three-level parking garage for 1,725 Senate employees at a cost of \$21 million, not counting property acquisition costs. An entire block adjacent to the Senate Office Buildings, including two hotels, restaurants, a number of apartment buildings and the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, would be leveled and lost. Elementary arithmetic suggests the odd sense of priorities involved. At well over \$12,000 per car space, the project cost (and such estimates are usually low) could finance daily round-trip taxi fares for each of the affected employees for approximately 50 years.

Beneath the surface noise and tension, however, change has been brewing in Washington, in and out of Congress -- potentially massive change that could leave an imprint on America and the world in several ways for generations to come. For example:

The Economy. With the country's influence in the world, and its internal stability, largely dependent on the health of our economy, current economic indicators suggest several reasons for cautious optimism.

Inflation, for instance, may be slowing down. For the first quarter of 1971, the rate of increase in consumer prices dropped to 2.7%, down from 5.5% in 1970 and 6.1% in 1969. Interest rates (the cost of borrowing money) have plummeted, with the prime rate down approximately three points from its high of 8 1/2% in January, 1969, and mortgage interest rates stabilizing between 7% and 7 3/4%.

RECOVERY COMING, BUT...

The Nation is producing more than ever, too. The Gross National Product (the output of all goods and services) reached a record high in the last quarter, even allowing for inflation. Housing starts are up, consumer spending is growing, industrial production is again on the rise, and personal income is increasing more rapidly than last year.

But all is not rosy. Employment continues to lag, and unemployment, including the "invisible unemployed" (those who drop out of the labor market when job opportunities disappear), hovers around 6 million. The housing "boom" has not yet made a notable impact on the low- and moderate-income market where housing units remain scarce and rentals expensive. And inflation, by no means arrested, could flare up again as the economy gains speed.

What it all means, I think, is this: while recovery is definitely on the way, to nurture it and sustain a broad-level prosperity will require a great deal more coordination and cooperation between Congress and the Administration than we now have in such areas as Federal spending, wage-price restraints, and monetary policy.

Welfare Reform. Quietly and determinedly, the House Ways and Means Committee is putting together a package of proposals that could revolutionize the country's handling of this persistent and disturbing (both in human and financial terms) problem.

Though few final decisions have yet been made, present indications point to a welfare reform bill which could: (1) establish Federal standards for welfare eligibility and benefits; (2) assume substantial Federal responsibility for welfare costs; (3) guarantee states and localities against future welfare cost increases; and (4) establish requirements and incentives which will result in maximum employment of those for whom work is possible and available.

"THE FUTURE OF MILLIONS"

One of Washington's ablest political writers summarized the significance of the Committee's work this way: "...these patient compromisers are grappling with two genuine crises -- the breakdown of the welfare system and the threatened bankruptcy of many big-city governments. The future of millions of poverty-blighted families, of President Nixon's legislative program and perhaps of America's political structure rests largely in their hands."

Consumer Protection and Campaign Finance. Few issues before Congress go more directly to the people's confidence in their Government than those of equity for consumers in the marketplace and the integrity of the way we elect public officials.

In the Senate, real progress is being made on comprehensive legislation limiting campaign contributions and expenditures, assuring disclosure of contributors, and providing a limited tax subsidy.

In the House, hearings on the Consumer Protection Act I have sponsored are nearly completed -- hopefully, for the last time -- and show continued strong support for an organizational structure at the Federal level which will assure that consumer interests will be effectively represented in the making of Government decisions and that consumer rights to quality, safety, adequate information and fair play will be protected.

Vietnam. Of all the issues we face, this is still the big one. And change has been evident here, too. With public opinion polls and constituent mail revealing increased revulsion at the war and growing impatience with the measured pace of U. S. withdrawal, sentiment even in the reluctant House has been shifting. More Members (though still a minority) are urging final withdrawal by the end of '71; others privately counsel the Administration to move faster; and most now anticipate some kind of legislation this year setting some specific date for ending our role in the war.

THE ULTIMATE IRONY

In the long history of anti-war demonstrations, the week-long visit of Vietnam Veterans Against the War was uniquely impressive. Here were people not even the strongest hawk could ignore or deprecate -- the troops for whom we so often appeal for support -- the men who were really there, who fought and sacrificed and experienced the peculiar brutality of this war, the men who've decided the war cannot be justified.

Their leader -- 27-year-old John Kerry, Yale graduate, ex-Navy Lieutenant (j.g.), decorated and thrice-wounded in Vietnam -- brilliantly epitomized his men and their mission. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (so movingly and coolly convincing I shall never forget it), he concluded: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

And now the ultimate irony! Pentagon officials have launched a major campaign to convince Congress that the Soviet Union has moved ahead of the U. S. in certain strategic weapons capabilities. Privately, they explain that while the U. S. has been spending \$20-\$30 billion annually for the past six years on waging war in Vietnam, the U.S.S.R. (whose military budget approximates ours) has limited its Vietnam spending to \$1 billion a year and put the rest into advanced weapons systems.

I wonder if they realize what they're saying: that even in military terms, our preoccupation with one tiny corner of the world simply hasn't been worth it and may, in fact, have gravely reduced our security throughout the rest of the world?