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Florence P. Dwyer

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# REPORT TO THE PEOPLE FROM YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER - 6th District, New Jersey

Volume VIII, Number 9



1631 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Thursday, July 30, 1964

## EYES OPEN

If you're at all concerned with what Congress does and does not do, now is the time to keep your eyes and ears open.

With the leadership of the House and Senate apparently having decided to make an all-out effort to crowd the unfinished business of this 88th Congress into the four-to-five week period between the two national political conventions, the chances increase that some bills will slip through without sufficient study and attention and that others will be quietly pigeon-holed under the pressure, or excuse, of time.

The House last week got an early taste of this danger. Although the actual legislative results were not, in my judgment, harmful, the speed-up procedures which were used prevented thorough consideration of the legislation, prohibited any possibility of amendments, and tended to discourage the degree of attention by the press and the people which the importance of the legislation warranted.

## "SUSPENSION OF THE RULES"

In addition to a number of bills considered under unanimous consent procedures which allows only a single objection to postpone further consideration -- ten bills of substantial significance were brought up in the House. Only one of these was brought to the floor under normal procedures which permit full debate and the offering of amendments. The other nine were considered under "suspension of the rules," a procedure which prevents amendments, limits debate to 20 minutes on each side, and requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

While the suspension procedure may be justified when a bill is genuinely non-controversial or when an emergency demands unusual speed, there is no good reason for resorting to it as frequently and indiscriminately as the leadership seems prepared to do. The temptation to use this and similar time-saving devices arises, I think, from the continuing unwillingness of the House to recognize that Congress has a year-round, full-time responsibility to the people we represent. If, as I have suggested before, the leadership would schedule the work of Congress on a Monday-through-Friday rather than Tuesday-through-Thursday basis and arrange to meet throughout the year, with appropriate periods of recess for campaigning in election years and reporting to our constituents at home, then we would have the time to devote adequate attention to the public business.

One of last week's suspension-passed bills illustrates particularly well the need for sufficient time on the House floor to discuss thoroughly the pros and cons and complexities of important legislation. This was the bill to protect postal patrons from morally offensive mail matter -- a bill I strongly supported and one I am happy to report was approved by an overwhelming margin. Nevertheless, serious questions of administration, interpretation and constitutionality were raised which should have been explored carefully, but neither proponents nor opponents were able to do so under the severe limitations of time. While I personally believe that each of these questions can be satisfactorily answered, as I shall explain further, the place to do so is on the House floor in open and public debate.

## URGENT AND OBVIOUS

The need for a bill of this kind is, I believe, urgent and obvious. For years, there has been a growing, multi-million-dollar traffic in obscene and indecent materials

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through the U. S. mails, much of it directed to young people, and the Post Office Department has been virtually powerless to halt it. For the first time, this bill provides a simple and effective way of stopping this traffic and it does so in a way that harmonizes the rights of the individual with those of society in general.

The mechanics of the bill would work this way. If the recipient of mail decided it was morally offensive, he could return it to the Post Office Department and demand that his name, or that of his child, be taken off the sender's mailing list. The Department must inform the sender and give him 30 days to stop further mailings. If the objectionable mail continues, the Department would require an explanation from the sender. If the offense is deliberate, the Department would be authorized to refer the case to the Justice Department which, in turn, would be authorized to bring suit against the mailer in Federal court.

The beauty of this procedure, as I pointed out in my remarks in the House, is that it would protect a person's freedom of choice and his right to privacy, especially in his own home. And it would do this without censorship, without restraining the free circulation of ideas, and without interfering with the right of anyone else to receive whatever mail he chooses. For this reason, then, the objections of opponents -- as sincerely as they were expressed -- seemed to me entirely groundless.

#### SANCTITY OF THE HOME

What the bill would do has long needed doing. It would apply to the mails the same kind of protection for the individual which he is able to provide for himself with regard to other media of communications. Depending on his standards and values, a person is free to refuse his patronage to a radio or television station, a newspaper, magazine, news stand, or theater if he decides for himself that the material they carry is morally offensive. Certainly, in the privacy of one's own home, a person should have the same right to refuse to accept mail he considers morally objectionable. Without this bill, however, there is no way to protect this right since most such mail arrives in plain envelopes or wrappers with no identification, until the recipient opens it, as to source or content.

This bill, I think you will agree, will be a landmark in the long struggle of decent people against indecent material. As such, it deserved more extended consideration. But its passage in the House marks a major victory, and I look forward to early Senate approval and final enactment into law.

#### OF NURSES AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Last week, too, the House passed another long-overdue bill, a bill to expand the number and improve the training of professional nurses. The shortage of trained nurses has reached critical proportions, to which many of us can attest from personal experience. In some hospitals, nursing aides now provide as much as 80 percent of the services ordinarily supplied by professional nurses. In New York City, over half the positions for professional nurses in public hospitals were unfilled in 1961. Public and private hospitals everywhere, public health agencies, and nursing homes all report similar difficulties in finding trained nurses. The bill we passed will, hopefully, encourage young people to enter this essential and dedicated profession, and help hospitals and educational institutions provide the necessary facilities for their training.

This week, the House has scheduled action on amendments to the Social Security Act -- of special interest to the 52,000 people in Union County who receive social security benefits. The bill would do several important things: increase benefits by five percent to help meet increases in the cost of living; extend the program to many people 72 and over who have previously not been eligible to participate; continue benefits to the dependent children of widows from the present age limit of 18 to 22, so long as they continue their educations; and permit widows to receive benefits at age 60 instead of 62.

There is much more in this bill, but in general it represents a most desirable updating and modernization of the social security system. Since it has wide bi-partisan support in the House, I am confident it will be approved.