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CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S
REPORT TO THE PEOPLE
 OF THE UNION-ESSEX SUBURBS



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ON SCHEDULING CONGRESS

Three weeks ago, I wrote that the period immediately prior to Congress' summer recess -- which begins August 6 -- would be "frantic", but that action on most major legislation would await the "cooler" months of fall and winter.

As it's turned out, I was surely right about the former prediction. But now there's grave doubt about the latter assumption.

Day after day, since mid-July, we have met in the House well into the evening to complete work on a host of legislation: appropriations for the Department of Transportation, the Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare, and for public works, the Emergency Loan Guarantee (Lockheed) Act, the bill establishing a joint Committee on the Environment (which I cosponsored, by the way), the resolution designed to cite CBS for contempt of Congress, legislation expanding the Veterans Administration's drug treatment programs, and many others.

But this has only been the surface portion of the Congressional iceberg, so to speak. On most mornings, and often well into the afternoons, one or more of my committees and subcommittees have been busy on such wideranging issues as: comprehensive new housing and urban development legislation, the Lockheed bill, consumer protection, reorganization of the Executive Branch, the policies followed by the Government in classifying and declassifying documents and other information (an investigation which stemmed directly from the "Pentagon Papers" controversy), hearings on the dangers associated with the practice of using highly toxic drugs in treating conditions for which the drugs have not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and preparations for further hearings on problems involving the administration of the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

THE DETAILS OF LEGISLATION

With each of these subjects having enormous potential impact on millions of our fellow citizens, and with each day crowded with committee meetings and House sessions, you can appreciate that my evenings have become more like "night school," for it's the only available time for preparing for the next day's work. Inevitably, too, there has been reduced opportunity during this period to attend to the demands of office routine. Fortunately, my able staff has pitched in to take up the slack and make certain that the needs of constituents get the attention they deserve.

Since this recitation of the legislative and investigative work we've been doing doesn't really communicate the flavor or feeling of our activity, let me illustrate by using the Consumer Protection Act as an example.

Two weeks ago, one of my Government Operations subcommittees concluded the third round of extensive hearings on our legislation. This past week, the chairman of the full committee and I, as principal sponsors of the bill, sat down in my office -- together with our respective staffs -- for several hours during each of four consecutive days for the purpose of assuring that our bill would meet every challenge confronting it, both from pro-consumer and anti-consumer groups.

We reviewed every single amendment -- word-by-word, paragraph-by-paragraph -- proposed by the witnesses on both sides of the issue. The discussions were lengthy and frequently technical. Conflicting points of view were thoroughly debated, meanings clarified, definitions tightened, but agreement on fundamentals made it relatively easy to reach rational compromises without acrimony.

Now I believe we have a bill which we can pass -- a bill which will vastly improve the Government's ability to protect 215 million American consumers and do so without imposing undue burdens or fears on business.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The full committee must act on the legislation, followed by another battle

--more--

to get the bill through the Rules Committee where we were blocked last year by a 12-12 tie vote. Finally, debate and decision in the House itself.

If all this sounds tedious, it is. But it's also necessary and valuable, for legislation in a democracy must be the product of consensus, after all views have been considered, and of persuasion.

It does take time, however, and time is something we won't have much of if present plans of the House Democratic leadership go unchanged. Just three days after writing my last report to you, the leadership met for lunch and quietly agreed to adjourn the House this year by October 15 -- two and a half months before the end of the year. To enforce this decision, they set a deadline of October 1 for committees to complete action on legislation -- three scant weeks after returning from the recess which is about to begin.

CONGRESS MUSTN'T QUIT...

I feel very strongly that this is an unwise decision. We simply can't do our business -- the people's business -- within this tightly constricted schedule. Most of the legislation considered major by the leadership as well as most of the President's legislative program would fall victim to an October 1 deadline -- and, without good reason, for no justification has been advanced to explain the decision.

On the contrary, every relevant fact I know of suggests that Congress should work right into mid-December at the earliest. The legislative load is heavier than usual. This is not an election year -- but next year is, and a Presidential year (with accompanying conventions) at that. Only once in the past six years have we adjourned as early as mid-October and that was 1968, another Presidential election year. Moreover, our five-week recess this year -- Congress' longest summer vacation in recent history -- was scheduled precisely because we recognized that our's is a year-long responsibility. And we're paid well for the work: \$42,500 a year plus expenses and numerous fringe benefits.

I just don't see how we can run out on the people this way, so, accordingly, I've urged the Speaker and the Rules Committee Chairman to reconsider their decision. As it is, Congress is in bad enough repute without compounding our problems.

...THE PEOPLE AREN'T

Throughout this period, returns from our annual Questionnaire have been pouring back in numbers which, I believe, will equal our best performance to date. Obviously, most of you have not been deterred by the longer and more detailed survey form. And the advantages to me of this additional depth to your views has been great. At every spare moment, I've turned to a stack of returns and immediately become captivated by this direct and personal expression of how you -- the ultimate holder of political power in America -- feel about things.

On the basis of a pretty strong sample, some early trends are becoming firm enough to report. For example: a U. S.-initiated ceasefire seems the preferred way to stop the fighting in Indochina; in only one of several areas has the quality of life improved in recent years and that's a reduced threat of nuclear war; most of you are definitely willing to pay an extra \$50 in Federal taxes, especially to clean up our waters, find a cancer cure, and provide better commuter transportation, assuming the money would be used effectively.

You also feel pretty strongly about unsolved consumer problems. You fear inflation -- so much so that a strong majority favors wage-price controls -- but you won't accept increased unemployment as the price of stability. You want national health insurance, believe the draft should be retained, and overwhelmingly believe that military spending is still too high.

Final results, I hope, will be available later this month. Meanwhile, thanks very much for joining me.