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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

by CONGRESSWOMAN

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The pace of Congressional activity has picked up substantially during the past couple of weeks - and with it the partisan tone of political debate has increased its shrillness.

Ordinarily, the House doesn't reach the heavy part of a session, with its long hours of debate and frequent voting on important bills, until late spring or early summer. These first months are usually devoted to committee hearings and the quiet, background work of investigation, fact-gathering, and bill-shaping.

But these aren't ordinary days we're living through. The Soviet Sputniks and the U.S. recession shocked our people - and, consequently, we who represent them here - out of any complacency regarding the American place in the world.

The present greater-than-usual activity is part of our response to the challenge - the challenge to strengthen our domestic economy and to make more effective our leadership of the free world.

Enter: Politics

An upsetting, or complicating, factor has entered this picture, however - election year politics.

I suppose it's inevitable. Our whole governmental structure, after all, rests on the shifting fortunes of the traditional two-party struggle for power. And we've thrived on this system.

Yet, there have been times when it encouraged irresponsibility, never a very attractive element in the serious business of government. Today may be one of those times. Let me give you a few examples.

First, the legislation which both Senate and House passed rather hurriedly last week which would freeze certain farm price supports at levels higher than those fixed by Agriculture Secretary Benson.

Food prices kept high

This was bad legislation - both substantively as a farm bill and procedurally as a political move. As I said in a speech on the House floor, it's bad for the farmer and the consumer both. By keeping the price of bread and butter and milk, for instance, so high that they're out of reach of many low and middle-income families, this kind of legislation forces the farmer to produce fewer crops and sell at high support prices to the Government, rather than produce more and sell at lower prices to people who need and want the food.

It's nothing less than artificial, inflation-producing scarcity - and in the midst of great abundance.

The political maneuvering was just as bad. To watch Democrats and Republicans from farm states trying to out-shout and out-promise each other in abusing Secretary Benson and holding high price supports out as the lure for farm votes is somewhat uninspiring. But when they do this knowing it's not going to help the farmer it's little short of hypocrisy.

Their strategy is really quite simple. When President Eisenhower vetoes this legislation, as he's expected to do, they can heap all their blame on him and continue to avoid the burdensome but important responsibility of devising and selling to farmers a genuinely helpful farm program.

We lost this fight on the House floor, 210 to 172, but I believe we showed sufficient strength to uphold a Presidential veto. And that's at least a victory of sorts.

All or nothing attitude

Another instance of the same kind of irresponsibility was the action on the Rivers and Harbors authorization bill. Of the 149 projects included in the bill reported by the Committee, 18 were objectionable to the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of the Budget on sound grounds - on the same grounds, incidentally, that brought a Presidential veto of this same bill in 1956.

Yet, proponents of the bill decided to brazen it out and get all or nothing at all. They defeated our efforts, first, to amend the bill by deleting the 18 unapproved projects, and next, to send the bill back to Committee with instructions to remove the offending items. The bill is now before a House-Senate conference committee which must compromise the differences in the two versions of the bill. If the unapproved projects stay in, the President once again is expected to veto it.

The thing that has rankled me about this procedure is the evident insincerity. Like so many other projects lately, this bill was promoted as an anti-recession measure - despite the fact that there is currently an \$8 billion backlog of

authorized rivers and harbors projects. It might help a recession three or four years from now, but it couldn't affect this one.

Nevertheless, even assuming a good case could be made for this bill as fighting the recession, how does one then justify the position of demanding every single one of the 149 projects, both good and bad, at the risk of an almost certain veto of all the projects?

Time for responsibility

Unfortunately, these are not isolated examples. There have been other cases this year and there will be more in the future. We're witnessing now, for instance, a whole flood of proposals allegedly designed to help end the recession. Some are worthwhile, but others are nothing more than pet projects which could never get consideration under normal circumstances.

These are times, apparently, that spawn this kind of irresponsibility. The combination of a recession, and the need for counter-action, together with an election year, places a premium on the political credit to be obtained from doing almost anything.

The President has warned against this temptation in wise words. He has insisted that programs and projects must have substantial merit in themselves, and that they must truly be effective as counter-recession measures.

This is clearly a time for a greater sense of responsibility to the common welfare we all profess to serve - not less.