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Florence P. Dwyer

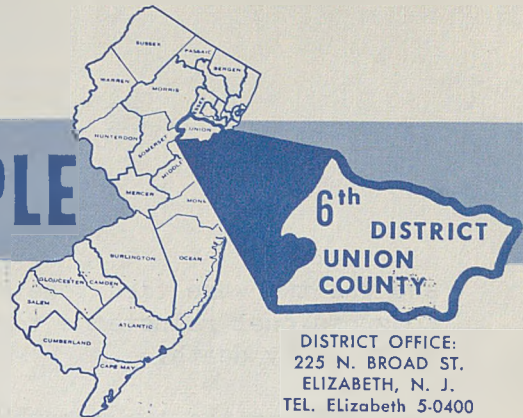
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CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF UNION COUNTY



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CONTROVERSY -- IN GENERAL AND IN PARTICULAR

A Matter of Attitude -- Whether a real trend has set in or whether it's simply an interesting coincidence, we don't know. But several of my colleagues here in the House have lately remarked that they, too, have noticed a growing intolerance among some people in connection with legislation which they support or oppose.

In such cases -- and, fortunately, they are still only a few -- the person writing or calling expresses his position as a demand, assumes that his is the only legitimate position or dismisses the other side of the issue as unworthy of consideration, and expresses indignation if his representative fails to indicate immediate agreement. Should the representative have the temerity to vote the other way, he is outraged and is quick to charge that his representative has "sold out" or "yielded to pressure" or is not a "true Republican" or a "true Democrat" as the case may be.

It is this readiness to question the motives -- as distinct from the wisdom or judgment -- of those who vote the "wrong" way that seems so objectionable. It reflects a closed mind, an insistence that all issues are either black or white, a refusal to recognize the complexities of legislation and to see that most important bills are a composite of "good" or "bad", requiring a careful weighing of the pros and cons in terms of their effect on the national and local interests.

NO "PERFECT" RECORDS

Obviously, no Congressman can please all his constituents with every vote he casts -- nor should he try to. In our highly diverse society, many interests and many points of view must be considered, and differences and disagreements must be expected. Many of us, through our newsletters, questionnaires, etc., invite discussion and debate of controversial issues as a way of learning what the people we represent are thinking. Such differences can serve a useful purpose in reaching decisions about what is good for the country, but only so long as each side respects the integrity of the other and is willing to concede that all truth and wisdom do not belong exclusively to any one person or position.

More Controversy -- Speaking of differences, two major bills are moving toward House action -- one of them this week -- under conditions guaranteed to divide Congress sharply. This week's bill is the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965; the other, soon to follow, is the farm bill. I shall vote against both, unless they are drastically amended on the House floor before the final votes are cast.

These are two of the most difficult areas in which to legislate and, despite the worthy objectives behind each, the two inadequate and inconsistent bills stand as convincing evidence that Congress has not yet found the right formulas.

A TWO-IN-ONE GAME

The Public Works-Economic Development bill, for instance, is little more than a composite of the old area redevelopment (or "distressed area") program and the accelerated public works program, both of them designed to channel Federal assistance into areas of high and continuing unemployment. Both programs have been in effect for several years

-- more--

and the two were tied together when public dissatisfaction with the meager results and Congressional reluctance to expand them individually threatened to bring each program to an early death.

Putting the two together, the theory goes, should assure that the bill will contain something for almost everyone and that a majority of members will be persuaded to forget their objections to the bill as a whole as a small price for the promise of Federal millions. Two years ago, I had a hand in defeating the Administration's attempt to enlarge and expand the area redevelopment program; if we did it once, there may be reason to hope we can do it again.

Because it should be defeated -- for a number of sound reasons. Neither of the programs has demonstrated that it has improved the economies of backward regions or put substantial numbers of the unemployed to work. On the contrary, Administration of the programs has been frankly political. Employment figures have been grossly inflated. Government subsidies have enabled some companies to obtain unfair competitive advantages over others. Substantial Government funds have gone to communities which do not qualify as distressed and have aided projects like new motels and hotels which result in little if any increased employment.

If Members of Congress will read the 17 reports of the Comptroller General -- Congress' own watchdog -- criticizing the administration of the area redevelopment program, they will find all the reasons they need to justify voting against this \$3 billion-plus bad mistake. And they will find further support in last week's Labor Department report hailing the decline of unemployment to the lowest level since October, 1957 -- an accomplishment which owes little or nothing to the programs in question.

A VERY IMPERFECT BILL

Who's Helping Whom? -- While Federal bureaucrats have been searching for new ways to spend new billions to help the poor, the elderly and the unemployed, the poor, the elderly and the unemployed have been finding new and higher price tags on many of the things they need to buy, especially food. Last week, for example, I looked at some of these price tags very closely and here is what I found:

Lettuce now sells for 46¢ for two heads as opposed to 29¢ a year ago. Potatoes, a staple of most diets, cost \$1.19 for 10 pounds today and only 89¢ last year. Tomatoes are up from 29¢ a pound last year to 33¢ a pound today. The price of whole chicken fryers is 45¢ a pound today; a year ago it was 35¢ a pound. Pork chops have soared from 69¢ a pound to \$1.29 and eggs have climbed to 61¢ a dozen today from 46¢ a dozen a year ago, while bacon is up from 69¢ a pound to \$1.05.

Overall, according to Labor Department figures, the food price index for consumers has reached 110.0, a new and uncomfortable peak. This is nearly 4% above a year ago and more than 8% higher than five years ago.

The reasons for inflation -- and that is what it is -- in the price of food are many, but unquestionably one of the most significant is the Administration's refusal to admit that its farm policy hasn't worked. We are subsidizing food production at an annual rate of \$2.5 billion; retail and wholesale food prices are rising; the number of farms and farmers are decreasing; yet, net farm income last year was no more than it was in 1958.

To suggest that something is wrong, I think, would be neither partisan nor rash. Nevertheless, the Administration's farm bill proposes to cure the ill by giving more of the same medicine. Among the dosages they prescribe is a big boost in last year's "bread tax" -- so big, in fact, that it's likely to add 2¢ to the price of every loaf of bread, not to mention flour and other bakery products on which poorer families especially depend.

Unless Congress rallies to stop this bill, much of the good accomplished by excise tax reduction, the poverty program, and increases in social security benefits will be slowly and steadily undermined by creeping inflation in the marketplace.