

Kean University

## Kean Digital Learning Commons

---

Florence Dwyer Report to the People Newsletter 1969 Florence Dwyer Report to the People Newsletter

---

10-2-1969

### Report to the People Vol. 13 No. 12

Florence P. Dwyer

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.kean.edu/cp\\_dwyer\\_newsletters\\_1969](https://digitalcommons.kean.edu/cp_dwyer_newsletters_1969)

---



CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S

# REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE UNION-ESSEX SUBURBS



12<sup>th</sup>  
DISTRICT  
NEW JERSEY

DISTRICT OFFICE:  
40 SOMERSET ST.  
PLAINFIELD, N. J.  
TEL. (201) 754-6686

REP. FLORENCE P. DWYER  
2421 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BLDG.  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515  
TEL. Area Code 202, CApitol 5-5361

Volume XIII, Number 12

Thursday, October 2, 1969

## IDEAS WHOSE TIMES HAVE COME

Periodically in our society, ideas which may have been kicking around or gathering dust for lengthy periods suddenly seem to gather momentum. As people and their news media gradually become more directly aware that a particular problem needs to be dealt with, the floodlights come on, news reports increase, demands for action multiply.

And Congress gets the message!

This process has been underway here lately in four areas of special importance to almost all Americans: consumer protection, Social Security, women's rights, and election law reform. In each area, one idea -- not necessarily new or unique -- has been emerging as the core of efforts to resolve problems which people have come to see require effective attention. If it hasn't already emerged, something like a national consensus is shaping up which is making it possible, and likely, that a significant corner will soon be turned in each. Briefly they are

### SPECIFICS

1. a bigger, clearer voice for consumers both at the policy-making and working levels of the Federal Government based on a permanent, statutory Office of Consumer Affairs in the Executive Office of the President along the lines of legislation I introduced on September 15;

2. a cost-of-living formula which will insure Social Security beneficiaries against the serious slump in buying power which millions of retired persons have suffered during the past couple of years of substantial inflation -- a proposal I have strongly backed for some time;

3. formal acknowledgement by the Government that women -- no longer a minority in size or spirit -- are entitled to protection of their rights and recognition of their responsibilities through an organizational structure at the Federal level designed to prevent discrimination and assure equality of opportunity, in keeping with my suggestions to the President in February and July; and

4. replacement of the archaic Electoral College system with direct election of the President and Vice President in order to minimize the likelihood of popular-vote losers becoming electoral-vote winners and to reduce the possibility of third-party candidates throwing elections into the House of Representatives.

### ELECTION REFORM

Of these four core ideas, the proposed Constitutional amendment providing for direct presidential elections has progressed the farthest, with the House this week having given the once highly controversial idea an unexpectedly resounding 338 to 70 vote of approval.

The one-sided nature of the vote was most encouraging to those of us -- and I include myself -- who have become actively concerned about the potential consequences of a presidential election which did not clearly reflect the popular will. There may be room and some good reason for indirection, complexity and ambiguity in other parts of the political process, but the choice of a national leader must be certain and unequivocal and directly responsive to the wishes of the people.

I believe the proposed Constitutional amendment will accomplish this. It will give equal weight to every person's vote. It will encourage two-party activity in hitherto one-party States where the "winner-take-all" basis of electoral votes discouraged real competition. It will enhance the national character of the Presidency as opposed to the regional coloration of the Electoral College. It will remove doubt and restore confidence in our political system.

If the vote in the House reflects national opinion on the issue -- as outside polls seem to indicate -- the necessary two-thirds approval in the Senate and ratification by three-fourths of the States may be in sight.

#### WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Though it hasn't been officially announced, the President has established a Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities whose job will be to make recommendations for the President's 1970 legislative and executive program. The Task Force met for the first time this past week, and I can report that its high-calibre membership leads me to be hopeful about the results of its work.

Having been invited to open its first meeting, I took the opportunity to review some recent history: my February letter to the President, reminding him of the continuation of sex discrimination and proposing stronger White House leadership in assuring equal opportunity, including establishment of a White House Office of Women's Rights and Responsibilities; the efforts of my women colleagues and me to persuade the Administration to recognize qualified women in making appointments; our extensive meeting with the President and my 8-page memo on that occasion outlining specific areas of discrimination in education, employment, compensation, retirement, etc. and suggesting specific actions the President could take to correct them.

But my chief emphasis was on the "action" character of the Task Force. Faced with an early reporting date, the group's recommendations are obviously intended to be taken seriously, a fact which will give their work a distinct policy orientation rather than the usual "study" flavor of previous groups whose work was destined to be ignored.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASE

Several weeks ago, I put into two letters what millions of older Americans have been thinking and saying and writing and worrying about: the six-percent-a-year erosion of their already marginal incomes by inflation. I urged both the President and the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee to take the earliest possible action to increase Social Security payments and tie them to cost-of-living increases. Many of my colleagues did likewise.

Now the action is starting. The President has submitted his proposals: a 10 percent benefit increase beginning next April, automatic cost-of-living increases in the future, the right to earn more without losing benefits, entitlement of widows to 100 percent of their husband's benefits -- with some increase in the wage tax base but a slight reduction in the tax rate, given the expected surplus in the Social Security trust fund.

This, if I judge correctly, will be the minimum Congress will accept, with the chances for more being quite good. Leaders of both parties, for instance, want a 15 percent increase effective as of next January 1, three months earlier. But the central need is for the assurance that benefits will keep up with prices.

With 25 million retired Americans on the Social Security rolls by early 1970 -- with their benefits, for many, the major source of income -- these and other adjustments, reforms and improvements cannot be postponed.

#### CONSUMER PROTECTION

Despite the obvious and growing need for effective consumer protection, with the dizzying array of new products and services in this age of technological complexity and general prosperity, such laws to date have been spotty and piecemeal with enforcement and administration less than adequate.

Prior to September 15, the chief vehicle for obtaining the needed Government-wide protection and representation was a bill to create a cabinet-level Department of Consumer Affairs -- a proposal which had advanced only very little. On that date, after months of preparation, I introduced an alternative bill to establish an Office of Consumer Affairs in the White House.

Hearings were held immediately thereafter and, to the surprise of many, major attention was focused on my bill as the better way of obtaining leadership and coordination in the effort to safeguard consumers' rights to safety and quality. As of the first of this week, 34 House Republicans and Democrats had co-sponsored my "Consumer Protection Act of 1969," top officials of the previous Administration had endorsed it, the chief sponsor of the other bill had dropped his departmental idea in favor of my proposed White House Office, and the Nixon Administration seemed at least generally favorable.