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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

by CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER



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One of the big mysteries currently plaguing many Members of Congress is centered around a hole in the ground on Capitol Hill.

The hole - a gigantic excavation for a new \$64 million House Office Building - has, in a manner of speaking, raised the question:

How can a \$25,000 appropriation for planning and study mushroom into a lavish \$100 million building program without a majority of the Members of Congress knowing what's going on in their own backyard?

Strange as it may seem, that apparently is what has happened.

Disclosure of the many unanswered questions involved in this building program was touched off by debate on the floor of the House over a motion to knock out of a legislative money bill a \$7.5 million installment for the start of construction on the new House Office Building.

COSTLY BUILDING PROGRAM

This motion offered Congress the opportunity to effect a sound and sizable economy, and I was happy to have a chance to support it.

I do not believe there is any justification - despite the claims that Members of the House and the various committees need more elbow room - for Congress to go ahead with such a costly building program at this time.

I believe Members of the House can continue to get along with two-room office suites, instead of three - as the building program will provide - until the burden our taxpayers are carrying is lightened and the finances of our government are in better shape.

ECONOMY MOVE DEFEATED

However, a majority of the Members of the House - Members who, to date, have wielded a heavy economy axe on such appropriations as a \$200,000 item for study of the critical problems of higher education - apparently decided they couldn't get along with their present two-room office suites. They defeated the economy motion by a vote of 206 to 176.

After the defeat of that motion, the House then passed the entire legislative money bill, including the building program item, by a vote of 278 to 93. I was among the 93 minority opposing this bill, even though its defeat would have meant a stoppage of Congressional pay checks on July 1.

I did so because of my belief that the building program should be halted at this time for economy reasons. Certainly, if we cannot spend \$200,000 studying the problems of higher education, at a time when our nation's youth is finding college enrollment increasingly difficult, we cannot afford a \$100 million Capitol building program.

It's true, of course, that this particular bill called for the spending of only \$7.5 million. But once this work has started, there can be no halting of the complete project.

DEBATE RAISES QUESTIONS

Lengthy debate on the Capitol building program prior to the House vote not only produced some sobering facts, but also raised several unanswered questions.

During the debate, House Majority Leader McCormack remarked - in supporting the building program - that "these buildings are not buildings for Members of Congress; they are buildings of the people".

If that should be so, I wonder if the people of America realize that the cost to them as taxpayers of this entire project averages out to \$228,000 per Member of the House of Representatives, or that the cost of a three-room suite in the new House Office Building will be \$376,000 per Member?

I cannot be convinced that the people of America - or the Members of the House - need another government building at such an extravagant cost.

A breakdown of the entire program shows these costs: new House Office Building, \$64 million; remodeling present old House Office Building, \$9 million; remodeling present New House Office Building, \$9.5 million; acquisition of property, \$8 million; architectural and engineering fees, \$5,230,000; construction of new sewer, \$1,327,000; miscellaneous, \$2,943,000.

WHAT HAPPENED?

During the debate, supporters of the building program argued that nearly \$15 million already has been spent in acquiring property and digging the block-square excavation for the building. It would be foolish, they said, to stop the program now with nothing to show for the \$15 million except a hole in the ground.

This brought forth queries from various Members of the House who wanted to

know why the program had progressed this far without their knowledge.

There were no answers, during the debate, to these queries.

Today, however, my concern is with the hole in the ground on Capitol Hill. I believe it should remain as a "monument" to one time when Congress practices economy in its own backyard.