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Florence P. Dwyer

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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE FROM YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER - 6th District, New Jersey



1631 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

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The thorough-going defeat of the Kennedy Administration's foreign aid program in the House late last week was the most serious in the new Administration's brief history. Moreover, it was not inevitable. The fundamentals of the program could have been saved. As a result, the most surprised people in Congress were those who engineered the defeat, a success they had not really expected.

The reasons for the defeat which, so far as the House was concerned, completely wiped out any long-range planning or financing of development loan assistance -- the heart of the President's bill -- were many and complex. Some go back a long way and have disturbed Congressmen for many years. Others were more recent and could have been corrected.

As they looked to me -- one of many minority members who are convinced that a reasonable program of long-term foreign aid is an essential part of our own national security -- here are the principal reasons why the House dealt with the President so severely:

Too much, too long

First, President Kennedy asked for too much. Under no circumstances was the House ready to give the President a free hand in spending \$8.8 billion during the next five years, a period of time which would necessarily have committed the next and unknown Administration, without any kind of effective Congressional control of the program. In 1957, Congress denied President Eisenhower's request for the same kind of program, even though it was much less expensive and limited to three years. It is ironic, by the way, that several of the Democratic leaders who defeated President Eisenhower four years ago found their own arguments turned against themselves this year.

Second, the ills of past and present foreign aid programs came home to roost. Despite widespread evidence of waste, corruption, inefficiency, unwise programming, etc., too little has been done to make the patient take the cure. Time after time, for instance, the International Cooperation Administration refused either to fire or to transfer key officials who had all too clearly demonstrated their unsuitability for the difficult job of administering foreign aid. And in this kind of program, more than in most, people make the difference between success and failure.

Third, the new Administration failed to convince House members that it had a clear idea of what it wanted to accomplish through foreign aid and how it intended to go about it. Millions of words were written about "imaginative leadership" and "creative ideas," but for many Members of Congress (including good friends of foreign aid) the program below the surface looked like the same old piecemeal and patchwork approach to a problem of the greatest importance. For some of these members, last week's defeat offered the hope of shocking the Administration into taking strong corrective measures.

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Fourth, President Kennedy unfortunately failed to answer a number of Republican members who asked serious questions about his foreign aid program and suggested serious compromise solution. Answers to these questions -- even simple acknowledgements -- would have cost him nothing. But none were forthcoming.

Inadequate leadership

Fifth, the management of the foreign aid bill on the floor of the House was inadequate. Leaders of the majority were sharply divided over questions of strategy. On at least three occasions, for example, Republican-sponsored amendments were stubbornly refused by the more partisan of the majority leaders because, as they explained quite candidly, they didn't want Republicans getting any credit for foreign aid. These amendments, which provided for a three-year program, would have been vastly superior to the bill which finally passed.

Sixth, and perhaps most important, the Administration bill provided no effective way in which Congress could retain control of a long-range foreign aid program. As a Member of Congress, I could not in good conscience vote away the powers and responsibilities provided by the Constitution and given to me in trust by the people I represent. A great many of my colleagues felt the same way.

In an effort to find a compromise, therefore, I wrote the President a lengthy letter early last week urging him to assure Congress publicly and unequivocally that he would respect the right of Congress to disapprove specific foreign aid projects whenever a majority felt it necessary to do so. I based my suggestion on a provision in both the House and Senate bills, which Administration spokesmen had agreed to accept, which reserved to Congress the power of terminating any or all of the foreign aid program by means of a concurrent resolution -- a piece of legislation not subject to a Presidential veto.

I reminded the President what he already knew, that this provision was meaningless because it could not be enforced. It could be made effective, however, if the President accepted the constitutional validity of the concurrent resolution and agreed in advance to honor it should Congress ever invoke it. This I suggested the President do, but to no avail. Had he done so, I feel sure that many members would have considered this a sufficient guarantee that Congressional rights would be respected.

A stormy session

These and many other factors came together and reached a dramatic climax last Wednesday in one of the stormiest sessions of the House I have ever witnessed. When Congressman Saund, the Indian-born liberal Democrat from California, offered his amendment to reduce foreign aid to a one-year program, thereby preventing long-range planning, it was like a spark catching fire. Neither he nor anyone else had expected his amendment to win, but disappointed supporters of foreign aid joined long-time opponents in an emotional rush to kill the President's five-year proposal with one decisive blow. By a narrow margin, they succeeded. And success gave opponents the psychological upper hand. It made it impossible from that point on, especially when the majority leadership refused to compromise, to save any part of the long-range program. The situation became so hopeless, in fact, that the leadership avoided a roll-call vote on the Saund amendment, preferring to accept defeat quietly rather than to risk the embarrassment of public repudiation.

The foreign aid bill now goes to a House-Senate conference to compromise differences between the one-year House program and the five-year Senate program. I believe strongly that a three-year program would be a sound and acceptable solution. It would permit long-range planning and encourage the elimination of the waste and haste associated with single-year programming, and it could be made more responsive to Congressional supervision. The atmosphere of the conference committee will, I trust, be calmer and more reflective than the House floor has been this past week, for the country needs the best foreign aid bill which thoughtful people can put together.