News and Comment

Political Notes: Congress Is Moving Along, and So Are Plans For the November Elections

A somewhat misleading overall impression that comes from congressional activity in the past couple of weeks is that things are in pretty terrible shape. Between the pressure to act on major bills and the pressure to adjourn in decent time for the fall elections, this is going to be a hectic summer on Capitol Hill. But this impression of a great logjam of legislation comes mainly from the attention centered on the Administration's top priority bills: the tax reform, the tariff bill, the social security medical program. All of these bills are the subjects of enormous controversy, and all of them, as matters involving taxes, must past through the hands of the same committees: Ways and Means in the House, Finance in the Senate. But the logjam on these bills does not hurt, indeed it helps, bills which do not have to go through the Ways and Means or Finance committees, for the difficulty on the top-priority bills assures that Congress will stay in session at least through the summer, and so reduces the time pressure on less prominent legislation, including a number of bills that have been followed in these columns. The congressional session could not be prolonged very much to allow extra time for such matters as the drug reform bill or the bill setting up new institutes to improve the quality of secondary education. It will be prolonged by the fights over the tax, trade, and medical care bills, and the prospect of a long session improves the chances for passage of the relatively minor bills.

Several bills have now reached the stage where final passage is routine:

• The House has now passed, and the Senate Commerce Committee has favorably reported, the bill to require all television sets to be built to receive UHF as well as VHF channels. The vote in the Senate committee, 14 to 2 in favor, assures easy passage when the bill comes to a vote on the floor, perhaps this week. This should be an enormous aid to educational television stations, most of which are in the UHF band, and so have been having difficulty reaching much of an audience.

• The House has passed and the Senate Commerce Committee has reported a Communications Satellite bill. Passage in the Senate will be routine, and the conference to work out minor differences between the two versions should have no difficulty.

• The House Rules Committee has finally agreed to let the conference on the higher education bills go ahead. No one is willing to predict just what will come out of this conference, for the religious question has come up over the provision in the House version to include grants as well as loans for private colleges. But the chances are good that some sort of bill will get through, although it may well turn out to be a minimal bill: really an extension of the already existing loan program for college dormitories, initiated several years ago as part of a housing bill, to include loans for classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The Senate conferees, partly because of desire to avoid raising the religious issue in an election year, are reluctant to accept grants, although they may finally do so; the House conferees, as the price for getting permission from the Rules Committee to go ahead with the conference, have committed themselves not to accept the Senate provision for a scholarship program without specific authorization by a vote on the floor of the House, which they are not at all likely to be able to get.

On some matters that are less well along:

• Oren Harris, the chairman of the House Commerce Committee, has introduced a drug reform bill, along the lines of the Administration request. The Senate version of the bill is still tied up in the full Judiciary Committee, through which it now has to pass. It was voted out of Senator Kefauver's subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly several weeks ago. But the Judiciary Committee is expected to report out a bill eventually, although one shorn of Kefauver's pet provision restricting patent rights for drugs. The problem here was that nothing very useful was happening on the drug bill in the House, and that the bill might therefore die at the close of the session because it could not be brought to a final vote. Now the prospects for a long session and the fact that Harris has begun work on an Administration version of the bill without waiting for the Senate to complete its action have increased the chances of a bill's getting through.

• The House Education Committee has reported out the Administration bill setting up institutes to improve the quality of primary and secondary school teaching. The Senate committee is working on its version of the bill and should report within a few weeks. Here again, the chances of getting a bill through have been improved by the prospect of a long session. There seems to be no great opposition to the bill.

• On the pay reform bill, intended to make it easier for the government to attract first-rate scientific administrative talent by making salaries generally comparable to what is paid by private industry, nothing has been done as yet. Again, the prospect of a long session increases the chance that something can be done. The bill, though, was given a boost when the U.S. Chamber of Commerce took a position generally favorable to the reform.

Looking Ahead

In general, the congressional session is shaping up as an unusually productive one, yet one that will leave a number of major areas untouched. Those education proposals for which the prospects are good, for example, are two which are essentially noncontroversial extensions of existing programs: the extension of the loan program for dormitories to other buildings and the extension of the program for improving the teaching of sciences and languages in the schools to secondary and primary school teaching generally. Prospects are at least very shaky on really new programs: to include grants as well as loans in the higher education bill, or to include even a modest scholarship program. The general federal-aid-to-education bill has not even been seriously considered this year. Thus, although the Administration is likely to be pleased

with the results of the current session, it is going to have a great deal left to push for next year. This, in turn, puts special significance on the outcome of the fall elections. Unless the Administration can at least hold on to its present majorities in Congress, the prospects for the coming session are most dim, since in general they will involve the proposals that could not be pushed through during the 2-year term of the Congress elected with Kennedy in 1960. For the Republicans the election is at least as important: the Gallup poll still shows nearly 60 percent of the country favoring a Democratic Congress, and if this holds true in November, it will be the first time since 1934 that the Administration party has gained seats in an off-year election. The Republicans, quite aside from a distaste for what Kennedy might want to do if he increased his now very tenuous control of Congress, will not have much to look forward to in 1964 if they cannot even hold their own in an off-year election.

The shape of the fall campaign has already become quite clear. Kennedy set the tone of the Democratic campaign with a series of speeches in New York last weekend in which he repeatedly portrayed himself and his party as the heirs to Franklin D. Roosevelt, eager to get on with the "unfinished business of this generation," in danger of being tied up by a Congress dominated by "people who think everything was done 25 years ago." Along with this came a great deal of stress on the Democrats as the "party of the people" and, implicitly, on himself as the beleagured champion of the common man: "I refuse to see us live on the accomplishments of another generation. I refuse to see this country and all of us shrink from these struggles which are our responsibility in our time. . . . Harry Truman said that 14 million Americans had enough resources so that they could hire people in Washington to protect their interests, and the rest of them depend on the President of the United States and others."

The Republican answer to this approach will be formally unveiled in a few more weeks, when the much-heralded statement of Republican principles will finally be completed. But the essential points are easily predictable: an attack on the Kennedy budget, which is now certain to produce a deficit in the coming year; a blast at the Billie Sol Estes case as an example of corruption in government, tied to an argument for Republican control of at least one house of Congress so that the Democrats will not control all the committees that are empowered to investigate such affairs; but above all an attack on the Kennedy policies as a grab for power that needs to be restrained by an independent-minded Congress.

The difficulty with this approach is that the Estes case, by itself, is not likely to be enough to make corruption in government a major issue, while the attacks on deficit spending and centralized power have been standard Republican fare, used in every election in the past three decades without notable success. They may represent good and valid arguments for voting Republican, but the record shows that they are not enough to provide a major victory. What the Republicans could use is a positive program to answer the Democratic charge that they are just against things. In a presidential year, the party nominee is in a position to offer such a program, but in an off year no one can speak for the party, and the individual leaders are too far apart to offer a coherent picture of what the party is for. This is what makes it easy to predict that the Republican statement of principles will be brisk in announcing what the party is against but vague in announcing what the party is for.

The Republicans' problems, combined with the confidence the country apparently has in the President has led to a general assumption that the normal goal of the opposition party in an off-year election, that of picking up enough seats to take control of at least one House of Congress, is a wholly unrealistic goal this year.

The interesting thing is that despite this favorable outlook for the Democrats, buttressed by Gallup polls showing a strong preference in the country for a Democratic Congress, the President obviously plans to play an unusually vigorous role in the congressional elections. In the past, there has always been a good deal of speculation, beginning about this time of year, about how much the President will involve himself in the elections. There is no such speculation this year, for the President has already made it clear that he plans to play the central role. He apparently intends to attempt to turn the congressional elections into a vote of confidence on his conduct of the Presidency.

In a way this is risky, for in recent decades the majority party has always, except in 1934, lost at least a few seats. By involving his personal prestige, a normal result might appear to be a personal defeat for the President. But although there will be a great deal of hokum on both sides during the campaign, the President gives every indication of being serious in seeing himself as the heir to FDR. He is apparently willing to fight hard to win the kind of Congress that will go along with him in making the New Frontier as revolutionary a period in American politics as the New Deal.

—HOWARD MARGOLIS

White House, Congress Seek Means To Guide Governmental Relations with Science and Technology

The federal government's deep and growing involvement with science and technology has spurred the legislative and executive branches to provide themselves with better means for making judgments affecting these fields.

The efforts toward this goal are going on simultaneously, but they are neither coordinated nor, in any important way, an expression of rivalry; rather, they are attempts at two different points in government to achieve some control, or at least some influence, over the enormous role played by science and technology in American life.

The problems that beset the executive and legislative efforts are very different, but the motivation is the same. In the 1930's, the federal government spent about $100 million annually on research and development. This year it is spending over $10 billion; next year the sum will exceed $12 billion. Federal money now supports about two-thirds of all research and development work in this country. There has been nothing resembling a master plan to guide this growth, nor has any responsible observer suggested that one is desirable or possible. The growth, of necessity, has been piecemeal, usually in response to specific problems, such as military needs, which take up more than half of federal research and development expenditures. In many instances, political pressure, based on regional interests, has been a factor behind research and development expenditures, such as those in behalf of coal or fisheries. But rarely, regardless of the reason for a particular undertaking, has any serious