

Somber Reflections on Congress by a Retiring Member

Representative Charles A. Mosher (R-Ohio), who has played a significant role with respect to national science policy and environmental and energy legislation, announced on 13 December that he will retire from Congress at the end of 1976. Mosher, who will be 70 years old next May, is a liberal Republican and former "country editor" who has represented the largely Democratic 13th Ohio District (bordering Lake Erie, to the west of Cleveland) since 1960. He told reporters that he was finally losing "zest" for the job of a congressman, which he described as one of high honor and good pay (\$44,600 a year) but also of "enslavement" to an "onerously demanding, hectic, fragmented schedule" that is almost without relief.

In an interview with this reporter, Mosher, albeit still professing the optimism of one who has long been committed to congressional reform, offered some not very cheerful observations as to why Congress is often mired in indecision and confusion, a state of affairs that has been especially evident this year in the case of energy legislation. As he sees it, the situation is ironic and paradoxical. During his 15 years as a congressman, the House membership has become younger, abler, and more accountable and staff resources have been greatly improved—yet, if anything, the conflict and confusion over major issues seems to deepen. "It seems that the more information we have, the more divided we are," Mosher said. He attributed this to the existence of a "myriad of little [committee] fiefdoms," an absence of party discipline, a lack of leadership on the part of the Speaker and the Senate Majority Leader and—more fundamentally—to a "profound, historic strain of Know Nothingism," or of distrust of expertise, both in the populace and in the Congress itself.

Mosher's own record should qualify him in the eyes of many as something of prophet. He was an early supporter of measures to advance civil rights and protect civil liberties (last year he received an award from the Ohio chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union). He took a public stand against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam as early as 1967, and was the first Republican in either the House or Senate to vote against military appropriations for the Vietnam war. He took a skeptical, uncommitted stance as to Richard Nixon and Watergate long before most of his fellow Republicans.

His support for legislative and governmental reform goes as far back as the 1950's when, as a member of the Ohio State Senate, he successfully sponsored "government in the sunshine" bills. In addition, as a high-ranking member of the Science and Technology and Merchant Marine and Fisheries committees, Mosher has been a sponsor and key Republican supporter of a variety of substantive measures, such as those leading to the establishment of the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), the Energy Research and Development Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and measures establishing the program of coastal zone management and the programs for the protection of marine mammals and endangered species. The establishment

of a new science policy advisory mechanism at the White House has been a particular concern of Mosher's ever since Nixon threw out the old apparatus in early 1973, and he was a floor manager of the bill which the House recently passed to bring this about. A belief in the efficacy of education has been an article of faith with Mosher, and he has constantly supported the National Science Foundation's science teaching activities. His high standing among his colleagues is pointed up by the fact that this year Mosher has chaired the weekly caucus of moderate-to-liberal Republican congressmen, the "Wednesday Group."

Mosher, who feels fine and doesn't look his age, is fully aware of all the advantages of seniority, and he naturally was tempted to run again next year, especially inasmuch as he is regarded as unbeatable. But he concluded that, at 70, it was time to yield to someone younger and more zestful and to adopt a slower, more measured pace and attain "a bit of serenity." He wants to take on a new career part-time, although what it will be he does not yet know.

Mosher believes that, in 1974, the House missed a chance to make itself a better ordered, more effective body when it rejected the so-called "Bolling Plan" for reforming the committee structure. After deliberating for more than a year, a bipartisan select committee

chaired by Representative Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) had recommended a wholesale jurisdictional realignment to limit each member to service on only one major committee and largely to eliminate the problem of two or more committees vying for jurisdiction over a particular field of legislative activity. For instance, a new Energy and Environment Committee would have assumed the jurisdictional purview of five other committees, some of which would have either been abolished or reduced to minor status.

But, being perceived as a threat by many of the existing committee and subcommittee chairmen and by various lobbying groups which felt comfortable with the status quo, the Bolling Plan was fiercely resisted. Aside from a few procedural reforms (such as forbidding chairmen to vote the proxies of absent members), one of the few significant changes to result from the plan was the consolidation of jurisdictions involved in creating the new Science and Technology Committee. Otherwise, the competition and elbowing among the committees was to continue—indeed, to cite one aggravated case, early this year the House leadership had to set up a special temporary select committee to handle bills pertaining to outer continental shelf oil development, about which a half dozen committees were all asserting an interest. Mosher remains convinced that "the only way to cure the congressional indecisiveness is somehow to concentrate authority."

The Know Nothingism about which Mosher complains is, as he knows, a problem that only education can cure, if it can be cured at all. "Congress reflects the public's demand for simple answers," he observes. "But these aren't the kind of answers you get from scientific inquiry."—LUTHER J. CARTER



Charles A. Mosher