With Shorter Stays for Legislators, Bigger Staffs, Who'll Run Congress?

Two years ago at an organization meeting of the Senate's select committee on the reform of its committee system, Senator Lawton M. Chiles, Jr. (D-Fla.) noted in passing that he hoped the reforms would make it possible for senators to develop greater expertise on fewer subjects so that it would be possible to have "senators direct staff, rather than staff direct senators."

The wry aside was an indicator of the undercurrent of concern running on Capitol Hill that because congressional staff has grown rapidly in numbers and professionalism, staff members are exercising increasing influence on decisions their bosses are elected to make.

Another trend, an accelerating turnover among legislators, may well be accentuating the problem. In recent years, the number of lawmakers who normally retire because of age or ill health or to run for other offices has been swelled by those who earlier would probably have continued in Congress, but now are simply choosing not to run. A major case in point is that of Representative Paul G. Rogers (D-Fla.) who has chaired the House subcommittee with major responsibility for overseeing health and biomedical research matters (*Science*, 7 July 1978).

The departure of established legislators has been causing a more rapid change in subcommittee chairmen and loss of seasoned members. The effect is to diminish the store of accumulated experience on which Congress has traditionally depended in dealing with federal agencies and programs. The buildup of staff may compensate in some degree for legislators' lack of experience, but a troubling corollary is that staff, in the process, may exercise undue influence.

Increased turnover is generally attributed to a rising frustration level and declining job satisfaction. The increasing complexity of issues facing Congress and the overfull and fragmented schedule of legislators is often cited. Other factors include declining public esteem for politicians, pressure from highly organized and insistent interest groups, the mounting costs of running for office and, especially for House members, nearly nonstop campaigning. Ironically, the congressional reforms of the last decade have in some respects made life on the Hill even more hectic. The reforms were directed mainly at breaking the iron grip of the seniority system and democratizing procedures in favor of more junior members. These aims have been to some extent achieved, but without making Congress conspicuously more effective. In particular, subcommittee activity has increased in an uncoordinated way that has resulted in an overload of the legislative calendar.

An example of the turnover trend may be found in the House Committee on Science and Technology, which at the end of the 95th Congress saw its chairman, Representative Olin E. Teague (D-Texas), retire and three and perhaps four of its seven subcommittee chairmanships open. One of these panels, the science, research, and technology subcommittee, which handles National Science Foundation and National Bureau of Standards authorizations and has major responsibility for science policy issues, will be getting its fifth chairman since the decade began.

A Dual Perspective

Also departing the Hill at the end of the 95th was Charles A. Mosher, an eight-term Ohio congressman who retired 2 years ago but has served for the past 18 months as the Science and Technology Committee's staff director. Mosher was one of the safe-seat incumbents who cited diminished satisfaction with the job among his reasons for leaving the House (*Science*, 26 December 1975). As ranking Republican, Mosher had enjoyed good working relations with Teague and when the committee's staff director, former astronaut Jack Swigert, resigned to run for the Republican senatorial nomination in Colorado, Teague asked Mosher to take the staff director's post through the end of the recently ended Congress. Mosher, therefore, can speak from the unusual double perspective of congressman and senior staff member.

In respect to staff, Mosher notes that a major buildup has occurred not only on committees and the personal staffs of legislators, but in such support organizations as the Congressional Research Service and General Accounting Office, and the new Congressional Budget Office and Office of Technology Assessment. Even leaving out such organizations as the Government Printing Office and Botanic Garden, which are listed under the legislative branch but not thought of as direct adjuncts of Congress, the number of congressional employees is now well over 20,000.

A compelling enough case can be made for the buildup of staff—roughly a quadrupling since the mid 1950's. As Mosher puts it, "Congress was overwhelmed by the volume of decisions it had to make, decisions of increasing sophistication, detail and complexity." He observes that "Congress tends not to be as decisive as an institution, to be confused by the torrent of facts." Congress had "access to so much information, abstract ideas, recommendations. So Congress reached out seeking independent advice so as not to be so dependent on the expertise of the Executive Branch," says Mosher.

The question now, says Mosher, is "do we threaten to overwhelm ourselves with our own bureaucracy?" At this point nobody has really defined the problem clearly, he says. "The pace of change has been so rapid and significant. I'm not aware that even the political scientists are looking at it."

Mosher and others say that the threat of staff intrusion on decision-making has always been regarded as greater in the Senate because Senators, being fewer in number, must deal with more legislative subjects and have larger staffs to assist them.

In the House, Mosher, who describes himself as an invincible optimist, sees some favorable developments. He notes that the average age of incoming members is lower. "New members are much younger and better educated. They're inclined to seek good advice and have the ability to use it, skills that many older members haven't had."

The phenomenon of more rapid turnover, however, does raise questions. The House Science and Technology Committee's subcommittee on science, research, and development offers an illustration of a rapid succession of chairmen of a panel charged with handling highly technical matters.

Through the 1960's, the subcommittee under its chairman Emilio Q. Daddario staked out a claim on nonspace science on behalf of the full committee. In 1970 Daddario left Congress to run, unsuccessfully, in the Connecticut gubernatorial race. He was succeeded in the chair-

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manship by John W. Davis of Georgia. Davis lost his primary race in 1974 and was succeeded by James W. Symington. Symington did not seek reelection to his House seat in 1976 because he was running, unsuccessfully, for the Senate in his home state of Missouri. His successor, Ray Thornton of Arkansas, then also served a single term as chairman because he ran for the Senate last year, also unsuccessfully.

The point is not that the subcommittee post seems to be a jinx for those with other electoral aspirations, but that short tenure limits a subcommittee chairman in developing familiarity with programs and clout with the agencies in his jurisdiction. Furthermore, no matter how

Battelle Forecasts Healthy Growth for R & D in 1979

Confounding grim predictions about the vitality of research and development in the private sector, Battelle Memorial Institute has forecast a healthy 14.6 percent increase in United States industry funding for R & D in 1979. Battelle, in its annual survey of R & D trends, also says the future looks rosier now than it has in the recent past. "Taken all together, real R & D effort, which had peaked in 1968 and moved more or less sideways since then, may finally be resuming a longer trend upward," the report concludes. At the same time, the report cautions that management of industrial R & D will have to improve if it is to sustain the rate of innovation desirable for worldwide competition.

Battelle predicts that industry will spend $25 billion for R & D in 1979, 3 percent more than an earlier prediction by the National Science Foundation. Federal spending, which is expected to account for another $25.7 billion in 1979, will rise at a slower pace: 8 percent, or precisely as fast as inflation. The study says the industry increase is sufficient, however, to push the total to 11 percent above the combined R & D spending in 1978, providing a real growth of 3 percent. Two-thirds of this gain will be in defense-related research, following a pattern present since 1975. Energy research, which accounts for 10 percent of all spending, is predicted to suffer an actual cutback, largely due to declining financial support for the breeder reactor program.

The author of the report is W. Halder Fisher, a 64-year-old monetary theorist and business-cycle analyst who has been at Battelle for 15 years. His predictions for R & D spending have usually been within 1 or 2 percent of the eventual outcome, a record that amazes some observers because the economic model for his crystal-ball gazing is highly subjective. "No one else understands how he does it," says one expert. "It seems like accurate hocus-pocus."

Fisher says that the hefty increase in 1979 is the result of sustained increases in federal spending for R & D—"the performance of one sector pretty much parallels the performance of the other"—and a tremendous increase in the cash flow at many large corporations. "Inflation helped to increase their liquidity, and R & D does well in times of plentiful funds," Fisher says.

Jordan Baruch, assistant secretary of commerce and director of a current study of industrial innovation, says he is not surprised by Fisher's numbers. "I'm concerned about what the money is being spent on, however. We fear that many corporations are shifting their funds to R & D with relatively short payoffs, instead of long-term or high-risk projects. We still haven't pinpointed the relationship between what is broadly termed R & D money and eventual product or process innovation."

Fisher also expressed concern about where the money is going. "I think industrial managers may even be oversold on the idea of high levels of spending for R & D. The crucial measure is quality and not quantity," he says. Indeed, the body of the report focuses on a so-called decline in U.S. entrepreneurship, caused in part by industry's insistence on profits in the short term.

The blame for such an approach may be laid at the feet of the modern corporate manager, the report says. Several specific managerial characteristics that inhibit industrial innovation are mentioned, including:

- growth of a professional management class, much of it transient, that has no entrepreneurial stake in the business;
- executive incentive programs that emphasize "accounting" concepts of achievement (such as steady profitability and low risk-taking); and
- corporate growth through acquisition rather than innovation or expansion.

The National Science Foundation, in a recent survey of 179 companies that devote major funds to scientific research, came to the same conclusions. Resources devoted to research are coming under increasing control by top industrial management, R & D officers complained. Managements are using that control to get short-term results.

Fisher says that "regardless of what happens to the totality of R & D funding, there will have to be a distinct improvement in the quality of both public and private R & D management. Both government and industry will have to undertake . . . creative changes in their management processes and policy criteria."—R. JEFFREY SMITH

References abound concerning the "loss of leadership" by the United States. Most of them look back to the decade and a half that followed World War II, during which the United States was indisputably the leader in world technology and world trade. Our leadership rested, however, not on our being the best among equals, but on our being the only intact developed economy in a war-ravaged world. As the other developed nations—especially West Germany and Japan—rebuilt their industrial capital and reentered world markets, we inevitably lost much of our previous competitive edge. Since the rest of the world has knowledgeable scientists and engineers and energetic business leadership, we can no longer take our competitive success for granted. The United States must fight for its markets, both at home and abroad; and the best we can probably achieve in the longer term will be a parity—not a superiority—with respect to the collective rest-of-the-world. To think otherwise would be blindly and dangerously chauvinistic.

—Battelle R & D forecast for 1979

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conscientious and interested in subcommittee business a chairman may be, the demands of campaigning in a statewide race impinge on a chairman's time and energies. Staff members acknowledge it is often hard to get the attention of a chairman engaged in a difficult campaign and, almost perforce, find themselves trying to fill the gaps on committee matters.

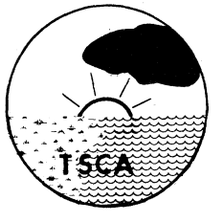
This is not to suggest that authority is being usurped wholesale by Hill staff. Many of the present senior staff underwent conditioning under an older dispensation. And most staff members observe the cardinal rule that, above all, staff members should not embarrass the boss or take credit themselves, even when it is due.

But conditions and attitudes are changing. Increased staff numbers mean the staffer has a less direct and personal relationship with his boss than in the past. Those hired because of their professional credentials have been trained to have confidence in their expertise and to assume responsibility. And in doing what they see as their jobs they are more likely to cross the line and infringe on legislators' domain than staff members of the past, who were acutely mindful of their patronage status.

Certainly, the higher turnover rate in the ranks of the legislators appears to increase the margin for staff aggrandizement. The shorter half-life of congressional service, incidentally, is not really new. Long service was much less common in the House earlier in this century. Before the New Deal, the typical congressman seems to have spent two or three terms in the House and then moved on. Those who stayed in did, of course, became seneschals of the seniority system. But the career congressman appears to be a phenomenon of the growth of the federal government and of United States power.

The trend toward more rapid turnover in Congress, if that's what it proves to be, may thus be seen simply as cyclical. But accelerated turnover and the rise of the congressional staff could produce synergistic effects. The congressional reformers of today may wish to project into the future the question of who's in charge.—JOHN WALSH

An Industry Study of TSCA: How to Achieve Credibility?



Faced with the prospect of increasingly stringent government regulation under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and other statutes, leaders of the chemical industry have found religion—a religion called risk/benefit assessment.

Industry leaders see risk/benefit assessment as essential to restraining regulatory zeal and avoiding excesses. At the same time, they seem to feel that the most dependable assessments will be made or sponsored by the chemical companies themselves, certainly on the cost side.

But attempts by the industry to produce truly credible regulatory impact studies may, if they are to be successful, require some changes in corporate governance, at least with respect to sharing information with outsiders. Indeed, it may not be stretching the point too much to say that if the impact analysis tack is really to be pursued in earnest, the result could be a foot in the door for reform of corporate governance.

Individuals such as John W. Hanley, chairman and president of the Monsanto Company, and Robert A. Roland, president of the Manufacturing Chemists Association, preach the gospel of risk/benefit assessment with fervor. Addressing the Economic Club of Detroit some time ago, Hanley proclaimed that objective assessment of risks and benefits offered "the best way, indeed the only sensible way," of making increasingly complex regulatory decisions.

Roland, responding to a question put to him recently by Du Pont's *Context* magazine, declared that whether government understands, accepts, and applies risk/benefit analysis to regulation will be the most consequential question facing the chemical industry in the 1980's. Should the answer turn out to be no, said Roland, the result will be "yet more unnecessarily restrictive legislation and additional excessive regulations."

"Already," he added, "innovation has been stifled, productivity curtailed, inflation fueled, our ability to compete in foreign markets hampered, and our domestic markets opened to cheaper foreign imports."

The new religion is finding expression not only in such exhortations by industry leaders to government but also in efforts by the industry to mount major new regulatory impact studies of its own. For instance, several chemical companies are participating in a broad study by the Business Roundtable of the impact of a variety of federal regulatory programs—ranging from environmental and occupational safety and health regulation to equal employment and fair-trade regulation—on American industry and the economy in general. But, of much greater direct concern to the chemical industry is a study by the Manufacturing Chemists Association (MCA) on the impact of TSCA.

This study, now in a pilot stage, is expected to be an ambitious, large-scale effort which would continue for up to 4 years and cost more than $1.5 million. Its principal aims, going from the relatively easy to the very difficult, are (i) to determine how much money the chemical industry is spending on the testing and administrative costs related to TSCA; (ii) to assess the act's effects with respect to the rate of new product development and changes in the kinds of products developed and in the level and pattern of R & D expenditures; and (iii) to examine, after implementation of TSCA (now still in its beginning stage) is well advanced, the costs and benefits of certain selected regulatory actions taken under the act to ban or restrict the use of specific chemicals.

The importance that the MCA attaches to the impact study is reflected in a memorandum which the association circulated among its member companies in October. This memo notes that, under TSCA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required to consider cost impacts in adopting regulations for implementation of the act.

Specifically, the memo points out that in issuing rules for testing chemicals for acute or chronic health effects, the EPA is required to take into account "the relative costs of the various test protocols

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