

Blank Check for Domestic Pump Priming Unusual Move for Congress

By A. ROBERT SMITH
Mail Tribune Washington Bureau

Washington (Special) — The most astonishing development of this Congress, operating as it has in an atmosphere that has been thick with domestic politics, is that it has given President Kennedy a blank check to spend millions of dollars just before the November election.

Congress last month enacted what is called the accelerated public works bill, an extra pump priming program which the administration requested in order to help economically distressed areas throughout the country with public works projects.

House Republicans lost by a whisker a party drive to defeat this authorization bill, only because a group of Pennsylvania Republicans voted for the bill in hopes it would help their distressed districts. Rep. Edwin R. Durno (R-Ore.) voted to kill the bill.

The Senate followed up by

appropriating a half billion dollars this week so that this program can start immediately—even before Congress has been told specifically how and where the money will be spent. This is astonishing because Congress normally jealously guards its authority to specify precisely how budgeted funds shall be spent.

Blank Check Complaint

One complaint in Congress about the foreign aid bill is that it gives the administration a blank check to undertake foreign projects which, if launched at home, would require very precise justification

and congressional sanction beforehand.

The administration defends this on grounds that the shifting maneuvers of international strategy in the cold war necessitate flexibility and preclude long advance planning on overseas projects which, after all, are chiefly undertaken to avert the spread of Communism.

Congress, in effect, now has given the administration authority to launch a domestic aid program with the same flexibility privilege.

It has left to a few government officials the vital power

of decision on which states and communities will reap the benefits from this program.

There are certain guidelines which, generally, limit this largesse to areas of substantial unemployment. But Edward Gudeman, undersecretary of Commerce, reports that there are 1,089 such eligible areas in the country. Presumably all of them will press claims for local improvement projects, as many already have.

Grants Pass Wants Pool

Grants Pass wants a \$100,000 swimming pool, North Bend wants a \$750,000 dock and Newport wants a \$375,000

sewer system, to mention a few of Oregon's eligible applicants.

Other communities elsewhere are less modest in their wants. In hard-hit Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh wants a \$4 million zoo and a \$25 million stadium; Erie wants a \$3.6 million auditorium; and Philadelphia would like a \$16.6 million extension of its subway.

The competition will be keen when it comes to cutting the money pie. The political pressures will be tremendous, as every congressional candidate recognizes the desirability

of being thought to have brought home some bacon from the federal pork barrel. The temptation or outright intent to play political favorites in approving projects will be hard for the administration to control with an election in the offing.

Political Favorites

Congress, of course, plays political favorites, too, when it adds or drops specific public works projects while working on regular appropriation bills. But there at least both parties are represented, and even minority party members have ways of exerting influence

on their majority party colleagues.

Handing the administration a blank check, however, clearly favors the political party in power, inasmuch as this is not a coalition government. If President Kennedy chooses to play favorites, he can skillfully help "deserving Democrats" running for Congress in areas where Republicans most threaten to win.

Unaccountably, Senate Republicans were restrained in objecting to the \$500 million blank check. But the Democrats who control Congress should have refused to grant

the executive branch this precedent-making authority. The "ins" of today are the "outs" of tomorrow and either party can play the game, to the detriment of responsible government.

HEARTS ACROSS THE SEA

London — (UPI) — London long-distance telephone operator David Bird, 26, returned home Tuesday with his bride, the former Gloria Harris, 19, a New York long-distance operator. They fell in love during their chats across 3,000 miles of Atlantic Ocean.

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