

Congress: Is It Frittering Away Its Power, Shirking Its Duty?

(Editor's note: Has Congress, under its seniority system, fallen under control of stubborn old men who live in the past and block progress? This question has come into sharp focus again as would-be reformers, among them former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, are assailing traditional procedures and demanding changes.)

By FRANK ELEAZER
United Press International
Washington—(UPI)—Lately our lawmakers have hardly been able to find their press clippings and letters from home for the deluge of printed matter to the effect that Congress is about to collapse.

A national magazine says in a headline that "our legislators are frittering away their power and shirking their duty."

A political scientist is doing fine with a \$5.95 book entitled, "The Deadlock of Democracy." It says approximately that Congress had slid off the back of the sleigh.

Every columnist with any kind of respectable "ivory tower" at all has been moaning that the lawmakers have lost touch with the people, among other offenses.

It is widely claimed that a bunch of old men have clamped a cold dead hand on the throttle of progress, and—to quote an article in the Saturday Evening Post—something must be done in a hurry to "save Congress from collapse."

Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower has said one thing to do is pass a constitutional amendment limiting service in House or Senate to not more than 12 years, a proposal that was received in pained silence by many of



OFFERS PROPOSAL—Since the days of George Washington, Congress has been fair game for criticism from all quarters, but lately even Congressmen have gotten into the act. Sen. Joseph S. Clark (D-Pa.), for one, has proposed that the Senate abolish its seniority system, put committee chairmanships up for grabs every two years, and throw out any chairman who survives to be 70. Clark is shown above in a recent news conference. (UPI)

have dropped in the hoppers, to be promptly forgotten, bills to cure an astonishing variety of ailments, real or presumed.

They proposed everything from putting the House on live television to reading aloud the Declaration of Independence each Fourth of July. Some members want to make the Congressional Record an honest account of what happens, surely a laudable aim. Republicans are in with bills to let them name 40 per cent of the staffs of committees.

Rep. Tom Curtis (R-Mo.) has put in Ike's constitutional amendment, or reasonable facsimile thereof. And Sen. Joseph S. Clark (D-Pa.) has even proposed—hold onto your gavel—that the Senate abolish its seniority system, but committee chairmanships up for grabs every two years, and in any event—throw out any chairman who survives to be 70.

The seniority system, by which the member of the majority party who has been around longest automatically claims the top committee prize and all the power that goes along with it, is in fact a main target of much of the current complaint.

At a recent "school" for freshman House members, a

distinguished journalist who was part of the faculty said the new members might as well face it; the seniority system, as a means for picking committee chairmen, had to go.

As to what might be put in its place, however, he said, "That's for you to decide."

Well, Congress decided that question way back, and nobody has since suggested an alternative that appears to most members to hold out any promise of producing uniformly better results.

Clark says let the committee members hold a secret ballot at the start of each Congress. Would that result in turning out, say, Conservative Sen. Harry F. Byrd (D-Va.) as chairman of the Finance committee, or Rep. Carl Vinson (D-Ga.), as House Armed Services chairman? Probably Not A Vote

Of course not. There probably would not be a vote cast against either of these two beloved elder statesmen.

Clark's other proposal—to bar the gavel to men over 70—of course would get both Byrd and Vinson, and many another chairman as well. But most members aren't at all sure their successors, on the average, would necessarily be an improvement.

One thing eating many would-be reformers is that the lawmakers have failed to pass, and show no sign of passing, certain legislation which the reformers think ought to be passed.

School aid and medicare for the aged are the two bills most often mentioned.

Stands In Way

It apparently is widely believed that Chairman Howard W. Smith (D-Va.) of the House rules committee, stands personally in the path of school bills and that one try after another in this field has failed, thanks only to him.

Let's say that Judge Smith has done his part, at the very least. But the fact is the Congress itself has not shown any red hot enthusiasm for a program of general school aid. The House a couple of times has had up the question and voted against it. Last year, House and Senate passed differing bills and could not agree on a compromise version.

As for medicare, you might think the House ways and means committee is all that stands in the way. That isn't so. House leaders doubt they could pass a medicare bill now, even if the committee approved it.

Does this mean that Congress itself, as well as some of its committees, has lost touch with the public? Not necessarily. Many members say the fact is that the public has not as yet manifested a real demand for either proposal.

On an average, the House probably is a little more conservative than the average voter. The Senate likely is a little more liberal. But on past performance, Congress usually reflects pretty well the state of public opinion. If and when an overwhelming demand appears for school aid and medicare, the chances are that Congress will see its way clear to enact them.

Most members think what set off the latest round of blasts against Congress was last year's deadlock between House and Senate appropriations committees, whose octogenarian chairmen got into a stand off over who would walk to the other's side of the Capitol building.

Pretty Parochial Issue

Granted, this was a pretty parochial issue. But nobody suffered much, the government didn't collapse, and some appropriations members even claim now that the tieup

may even have saved some millions of dollars.

In the end, as usually happens when sore spots in Congress are beginning to fester, the leaders took over and got things moving again.

Historically, that is what always happens in Congress. Back in 1910, when Speaker Joe Cannon got too big for his britches, the House trimmed him down. It handed much of his power to the rules committee, which, many years later, was itself deemed

to have got out of hand. That too was corrected, at the start of the last Congress.

Goodness knows, the Congress has faults. Who or what institution hasn't? The question is, has the time come to panic?

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\$39 Million in Taxes Is Levied

Oregon counties levied nearly \$39 million in property taxes for the fiscal year to end June 30, 1963, according to the Bureau of Municipal Research and Service at the University of Oregon.

The report obtained in cooperation with the Association of Oregon Counties, shows that an additional \$191 million has been levied by cities, school districts and special districts.

The counties also are responsible for collecting special assessments amounting to more than \$2 million. An exception is Jackson county which has made no tax levy for county purposes since 1957, because O and C funds finance the county operation. The other 35 counties have property tax levies ranging from \$62,425 in Wheeler county to \$18,122,170 in Multnomah county.

On a per capita basis, county property taxes vary from \$4.33 per capita in Benton to \$59.04 per capita in Morrow. The median per capita county property tax is \$22.27.

One-half of the counties levy property taxes which amount to between \$16 and \$31 per capita. Herman Kehrl, director of the Bureau of Municipal Research and Service, pointed out that this latest available tabulation indicates that the counties receive more than 40 per cent of their revenue from the property tax.

Range of Reliance
There is a wide range of reliance on this source and a wide variation in property tax rates among the counties, he noted.

One third of Oregon's counties obtain more than half of their revenues from taxes on property and several obtain two thirds of their revenues from this source.

County property taxes have provided a declining share of total county revenues in Oregon through recent years. In 1934, county property taxes provided 77

Ike's friends on Capitol Hill. Well, what about it? Is Congress about to reform?

Yes, it fully intends to raise its own pay, maybe before it adjourns for the year. And it may even break with the past and declare itself an

official late-summer vacation, so the younger members can get to the mountains or beach with the kiddies. Anything much beyond that?

Don't be silly. Then is the outlook for democracy hopeless? Claimed It Failed

Before the first Congress was well organized critics claimed it had failed. They said that President George Washington was really running things, and that Congress had defaulted its powers.

In 1805 a visiting Englishman wrote home that imagination in Congress was dead; that the members dressed and acted like bums. An official history of the House records that President Thomas Jefferson in his time was viewed as a dictator. It was said that party members in Congress were simply taking their orders from him.

The fact is, Congress always has been fair game for assault by everybody from crack-barrel philosophers to newspaper cartoonists. The general picture, according to George Galloway, who wrote the official House history, has been of a body "composed of middle-aged windbags with open mouths, 10-gallon Texas hats, and flowing coattails."

Image Has Changed

Sartorially, the image may have changed somewhat recently, but the criticism continues unaltered. Lately even some members of Congress have gotten into the act. They

per cent of total county revenues. In 1958-59 county property taxes provided 42.2 of total county revenues.

A Diminishing Share
County property taxes also have constituted a diminishing share of total property taxes in the state—20.7 per cent in 1954-55, 18.8 per cent in 1957-58, 17.4 per cent in 1960-61 and 16.8 per cent in 1962-63.

Property tax levies by counties for the current fiscal year are \$1.8 million, or 5 per cent, higher than last year. Levies in 10 counties, however, are lower than last year. These counties are Clatsop, Crook, Klamath, Lake, Lane, Lincoln, Malheur, Morrow, Tillamook and Union.

Morrow with 13.3 had the highest per cent of decrease and Jefferson county had the highest per cent of increase, 56.5, over the previous fiscal year.

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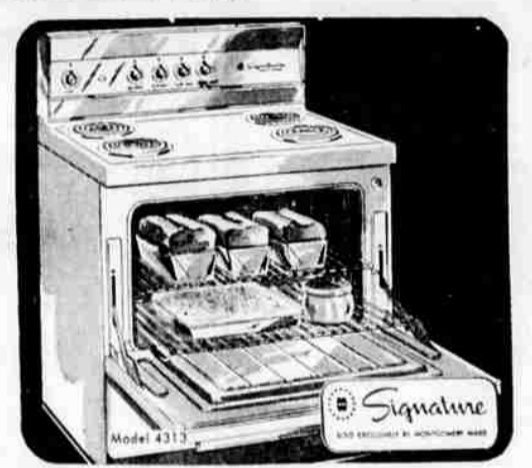
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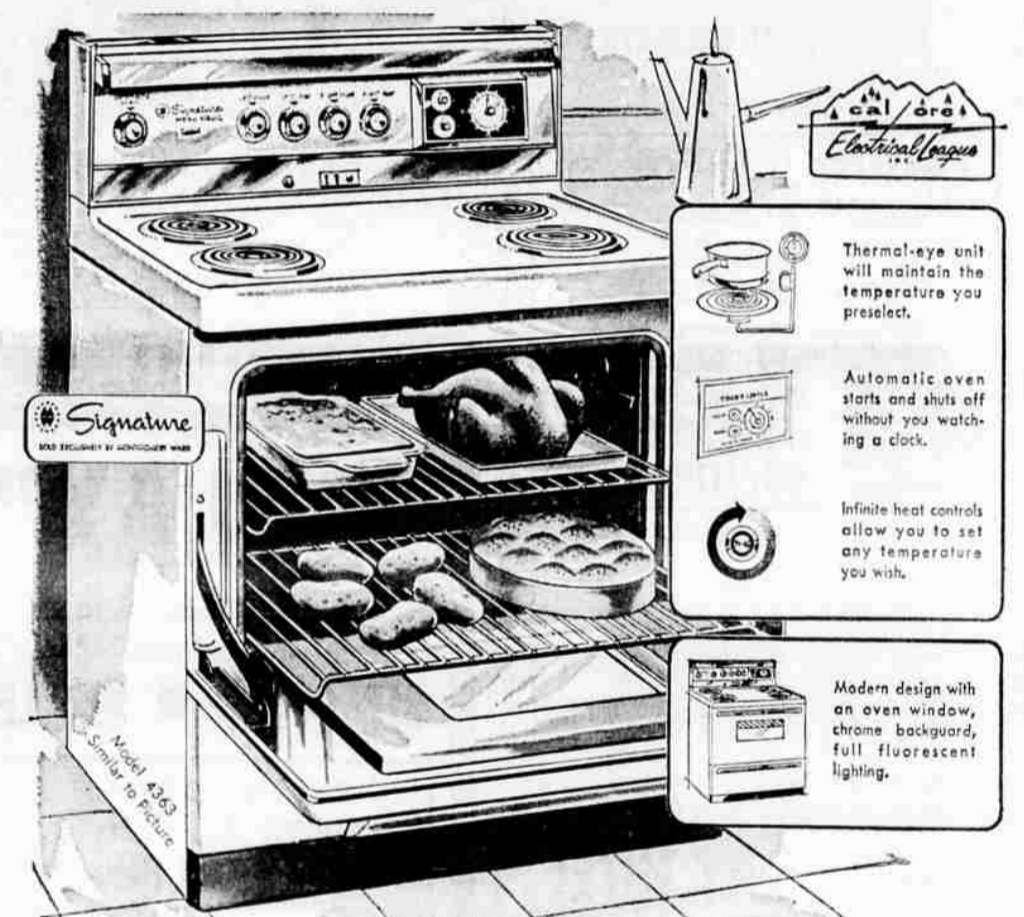
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An increase in building permit valuations in the city of Medford for January, 1963, compared to January, 1962, has been reported by the University of Oregon Bureau of Business Research.

In January, 1963, total value of building permits was \$343,780. It was \$198,000 in the same month of the previous year.

Building permits from 147 identical reporting centers in Oregon totaled \$16,709,705 in January, 1963. This was a decrease of 16.1 per cent compared to January, 1962.

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