

The post-Watergate change in congressional committees

Over the past 10 years, due to congressional “reforms” and numerous watergatings of leading congressional figures, the key committees in the House have changed significantly. Important committees have already been destroyed as power centers comitted to legislating the industrial and military advancement of the nation.

Armed Services Committee

In 1970 the Armed Services Committee was run by three men committed to a strong U.S. military, using America’s scientific and technological capabilities. The committee, chaired by Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.) with Phillip Philbin (D-Mass.) second ranking and F. Edward Hebert (D-La.) third, was important in the passage of the Antibalistic Missile System legislation, the development of the space program and the supersonic transport plane.

In 1970 Hebert succeeded to the chairmanship, following the death of Rivers and the primary defeat of Philbin. Rivers has been the target of vicious slander attacks by such columnists as the late Drew Pearson, who labeled him “the House drunk.”

Although Hebert, who was first elected to Congress in 1940, attempted to keep the committee in the hands of those supporting a strong U.S. military, he could not prevent the House leadership in the 93rd Congress from placing liberals Ron Dellums (D-Calif.) and Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) on the committee. But the major blow to the committee came in 1974, with the Congress elected in the wake of Watergate. The huge freshman Democratic Congress, the first to elect committee chairmen by caucus, and without the seniority system, deposed Hebert as chairman. The new chairman, Mel Price (D-Ill.), though an oldtimer elected in 1944, does not have the stature of Hebert.

Six Democratic congressmen will definitely not remain on the committee in 1980, because of retirement, death, or primary defeats. The most significant is the retirement of Richard Ichord (D-Mo.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Research and Development, the com-

mittee key to advancing new military technologies. As his final activity in Congress, Ichord is heading up an investigation into America’s industrial capability to sustain an in-depth military buildup.

Agriculture Committee

In 1970, the committee was in the hands of W. H. Poage, a Texas Democrat first elected to the House in 1936. By 1975, after almost four decades in the House, Poage was number two on the committee, and the men who had been second and third in 1970 had both retired.

As part of the post-Watergate ousters, Poage was replaced by Thomas Foley, a Democrat from Washington State, who along with Carter and Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland is a member of the Trilateral Commission. Foley’s chairmanship has meant a much more antiproducer orientation for the committee.

Foley has backed legislation limiting pesticide use, and has refused to move for emergency farm relief by raising parity levels to 90 percent. His stance on parity has been evident since 1977, when he allowed a member of the committee to demand a roll call vote on an emergency parity measure, defeating the measure, which had passed a voice vote. Given his record, Foley now faces a tough reelection fight.

Budget Committee

In 1974, along with other major “reforms,” the Congress established the House and Senate Budget Committees and the Congressional Budget Office, charged with setting overall tax and expenditure limits that committees are required to adhere to in making their specific allocations. These new committees were a major factor in destroying the power of other individual committee chairmen. At the same time, they gave enormous power to the Budget Committee chairmen, who could shape government policy by setting spending limits for general programs and departments. Significantly, the first, and so far only, head of the Congressional Budget Office, which advises the Budget

What happened to the key House Committee leadership of 1970

Committee	Leadership	Status
Agriculture Committee	Chairman: W. R. Poage (D-Tex.)	Deposed from chairmanship in 1974, retired in disgust in 1976.
	2nd ranking: John McMillan (D-S.C.)	Defeated in primary in 1972.
	3rd ranking: Thomas Abernethy (D-Miss.)	Retired in 1972.
Armed Services Committee	Chairman: Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.)	Slandered as "House drunk" by Eastern media, died in office 1970.
	2nd ranking: Phillip Philbin (D-Mass.)	Defeated in primary after district he represented for 30 years was redistricted.
	3rd ranking: F. Edward Hebert (D-La.)	Deposed as chairman in 1974, retired in disgust in 1976.
Banking Committee	Chairman: Wright Patman (D-Tex.)	Deposed as chairman in 1975, replaced by 4th-ranking member Henry Reuss (D-Wash.)
	2nd ranking: William Barrett (D-Pa.)	Died in 1976.
	3rd ranking: Leonor Sullivan (D-Mo.)	Retired in 1976.
Administration Committee	Chairman: Samuel Friedel (D-Md.)	Lost primary in 1970 by 38 votes.
	2nd ranking: Wayne Hays (D-Oh.)	Resigned in 1976 after scandal involving entrapment by a mistress, Elizabeth Ray.
	3rd ranking: Frank Thompson (D-N.J.)	Named in Abscam entrapment scheme.
Ways and Means	Chairman: Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.)	Resigned as chairman after 16 years in 1974 after a scandal involving a drunk Mills and a stripper, Fanne Fox. Retired in 1976.
	2nd ranking: Hale Boggs (D-La.)	Died in a plane crash in 1972.
	3rd ranking: John Watts (D-Ky.)	Died in 1971.
Appropriations	Chairman: George Mahon (D-Tex.)	Retired in 1978.
	2nd ranking: Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.)	Current chairman.
	3rd ranking: Otto Passman (D-La.)	Lost the primary in 1976 after being indicted for extorting foreign aid contracts, was cleared earlier of charges of bribery in the Koreagate scandal.
Merchant Marine	Chairman: Edward Garmatz (D-Md.)	Retired in 1972 after his career was ruined by charges of bribery and conspiracy. The Justice Department acknowledged that a witness had forged documents and lied during a grand jury testimony.
	2nd ranking: Leonor Sullivan (D-Mo.)	Retired in 1976.
	3rd ranking: Frank Clark (D-Pa.)	Pleaded guilty in 1979 to mail fraud and income tax evasion and received a two year prison term in 1979.

Committees, is Alice Rivlin, formerly an economist with the liberal Brookings Institution.

While the chairman of the Budget Committee is limited to six years in office, the current chairman, Robert Giaimo (D-Conn.) is leaving anyway because he is retiring from Congress. An intense three-way fight is under way for the chairmanship between two liberal congressmen, Paul Simon (D-Ill.) and David Obey (D-Wis.), and moderate Democrat James Jones (D-Okla.). Obey's staff is confident that he has the votes in the caucus needed to win.

An Obey chairmanship would consolidate the Budget Committee as an instrument by which the House leadership and a Carter administration can ensure a budget reflecting their policies. Of Congressman Obey's two opponents, "liberal" Paul Simon supports a balanced budget and crippling credit controls. Congressman Jones, a "fiscal conservative" according to his staff, is concerned that there be adequate money to "expand the economic base."

Commerce Committee

This important committee, which oversees most federal regulatory agencies and reviews most consumer legislation, has been in the hands of Harley Staggers (D-W.Va.) for 13 years. However, the committee will change hands next session, with the retirement of Congressman Staggers, who has served in the House since 1948. Although he was able to maintain his chairmanship position when the 1974 crop of mostly liberal, post-Watergate congressmen entered the House, Staggers in fact lost control of his committee. At that time 12 freshmen were seated on the 29-member Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. With the help of the freshmen, Cong. John Moss (D-Calif.), a highly vocal environmentalist, in 1974 challenged Staggers for the chairmanship of the Investigations Subcommittee held by Staggers. Moss won. Although Staggers formally remained chairman, Moss was in effective control.

Now the committee is being renamed the Energy and Commerce Committee and has been given a new mandate by the Congress to "write national energy policy generally." In addition to its previous functions, the committee will consolidate under its control all energy matters with a few exceptions including research and development, which will remain with Science and Technology, and some tax matters staying with Ways and Means.

The new committee chairman will be John Dingell (D-Mich.), an environmentally oriented congressman. Dingell was a key author of the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires that every time the federal government plans a project, an environmental impact statement be filed, a process that has severely hurt federal water program and other projects.



'You need to get things done'

Former Cong. Bob Poage, a leading Texas Democrat, served in the House for nearly 40 years. When he retired in 1976, he had been ousted from his Agriculture Committee chairmanship by the new Congress that came in in the wake of Watergate.

EIR: Congressman, what do you think have been the effects of the committee reforms established in the House? We are looking into the effect they have had on the role of the committee chairmen and the committees.

Poage: I was assistant to the House Agriculture Committee chairman for sixteen years and chairman for eight, and both myself and the other chairman had the reputation of being rough operators. We ran the committee with an iron hand.

We had the reputation of being ruthless. They ousted me because many new members felt I was too arbitrary and too harsh. Mr. Foley, the current chairman, is a fine man but he is too easy with the committee. He didn't demand anything, and the committee doesn't get anything done.

EIR: Would you say there is a difference in policy between you and Mr. Foley, that you favor the producers more?

Poage: To some degree, yes.

Foley feels a greater responsibility to the consumers, that's due to the age, generation, and the times. I felt the producers are vital to the welfare of the nation. I came from a generation and time and area where production was more important than today and farmers were more important than they are today.

Forty years ago, I joined the committee. I didn't change fast enough.

EIR: How do you think the reforms have changed the Congress?

Poage: The basic thing that's happened is that Congress as a whole sought to establish rules that give new members a larger voice than ever in the past. Foley represents

that, I represent the contrary.

I think it was important to expedite things and get things done and you couldn't if there is interminable debate and discussion. You need people to move with the chairman and get things done. We did bring legislation out and we did pass it. The weakness of the present system is not simply Foley's; the members feel that more people should share the responsibility and when they do it slows down the committee and you lose a centralized committee.

There are multitudes of autonomous subcommittees with their staffs, which increases the cost of government tremendously.

There are hundreds of subcommittees, which are trying to make each individual an outstanding congressman, of outstanding importance. When there are 200 subcommittees they are never as important as a committee chairman when there are 18 committees. It hasn't given the congressmen the recognition they wanted from it.

Now the Congress is unable to pass legislation because the subcommittee hears a bill, the full committee never hears testimony, nor do they get an understanding of the bills.

The large committee has less opportunity to know the subject matter. When a bill goes to the floor and a member asks a committee member to answer a question on it, they don't know anything. The committee is thus not able to have the floor action we had. The legislation now doesn't have the preparatory activity and they don't pass as many bills. Yet many more go to the floor and more time is spent on the floor and less in hearings.

I feel that the so-called reforms haven't brought the intended results. After World War II we had reforms which cut the number of committees in half and it speeded up the action in the House. There will be a return to smaller committees, fewer committees, combined committees.

We desperately need it in Congress, we had it after the war and we abandoned it. The members should only get one committee. The only reason for more than one is for prestige at home.

When I went into Congress in 1937, I had six committees and I didn't give any serious help to any because I didn't know anything about the subjects. I think congressmen should know all about their subjects, they should be specialists. Now they are a jack-of-all-trades and master of none.

EIR: What would you consider your most important accomplishment in your forty years?

Poage: I would say the Poage-Aiken bill, which set up rural water systems all over, it established running water in small towns. I guess also the rural telephone bill, but the water one was more important.



'Like chickens without a head'

Cong. Richard Nolan was first elected to Congress in 1974. He serves on the Small Business and Agriculture Committees and is chairman of the Rural Development subcommittee of Agriculture. Congressman Nolan is retiring this year and going into the export business, out of disgust with the "paralysis" of Congress.

EIR: Why did you decide to leave Congress this year?

Nolan: I had to spend one million dollars to serve six years in Congress. I had to raise it; my district is a marginal district, and I was spending half my time campaigning and raising money. I didn't go into public service to be a professional fundraiser. It was a combination of witnessing the paralysis in Congress and spending an inordinate amount of time raising money which convinced me not to run again, to enter into an arena more constructive. I will go into export management, to assist in overseas development.

As a congressman, you go back to the district Thursday night and then come back to Washington Tuesday and you are exhausted from all the fundraisers. You only spend a couple of days legislating. You get interrupted all day with votes on innocuous matters like reading the *Journal*. A couple of us figured it out one day that the innocuous votes take away two to three months of actual working time. Under the old procedure when you had stronger committees, you had fewer votes but they lasted longer.

My point is that you can have the votes of concern to significant minorities but they can be bunched together. You can schedule the votes at a predetermined time.

Many members call for a quorum as a dilatory matter. People figure we can keep Congress from working two or three months a year. People will call for record votes for this reason. It is deliberately against Congress. They feel that that which governs best governs least. If we keep walking around like dummies and voting on irrelevant matters, it's ridiculous. . . .

We are going around like chickens without a head, because some people want a good voting record. People don't look at what the Congress votes on, just how many votes they have cast.