
Interview

How Rep. Stenholm sees his policy role

Charles Stenholm (D-Texas) is the coordinator of the Conservative Democratic Forum in Congress. He serves on the Agriculture and Small Business Committees. The following excerpted interview was conducted on June 22 by EIR's Stanley Ezrol in the heat of the congressional battle over the President's tax and budget plans.

EIR: How do you see the Democratic Party's role in this Congress in terms of economic policy?

Stenholm: The first expression I would make is one of disappointment in the fact that we, as Democrats, as yet have not come forward with an economic plan that is any kind of positive and concrete change in economic direction that we could rally behind. All that I have heard thus far has been criticism of the President's plan, but I am one of these that believes that if you're going to criticize someone else's plan, you should put forward one of your own. . . . The role as Democrats, from the standpoint of our leadership, has been one of disappointment to me.



Now, we will speak as the Conservative Democratic Forum and those of us who believe that there is a better way. We think that right now the bipartisan plan [Gramm-Latta] that we have supported has good possibilities of working. . . . I certainly have reservations about a three-year tax reduction. I have reservations about . . . the full Kemp-Roth approach. I campaigned against it two years ago, because at that time we were talking about . . . not necessarily reducing expenditures, and I didn't believe that that would work at all. Now we find that we've come a long way toward meeting many of the objections that I've had.

EIR: What do you see as the role of the Federal Reserve? Do you think that Congress should be taking any action to modify the powers and responsibilities of the Fed?

Stenholm: I think it's time for us to have a good, in-depth study of the Reserve—its past, its present, and its future role. I think Congress certainly has a power and a responsibility, and one we should exercise to see whether or not there could be some improvement.

EIR: The President has appointed a commission to study the use of gold in the monetary system. Do you see any reason to restore some sort of gold reserve system?

Stenholm: I do. I think that there is one of the areas that we should take a good, in-depth look at to see if that would not be meritorious as far as future financial stability. . . . I think it has some considerable merit.

EIR: You said earlier that you had feelings of disappointment with the Democratic Party leadership. Do you mean the Democratic National Committee, the congressional leadership, or both?

Stenholm: Both. You see, the frustration that we conservative Democrats have had built up over a period of years has been the almost total control by the more liberal element of the party. . . . All I hear is criticism of us conservative Democrats, criticism of what we're doing, threats by some to kick some of us out of the party. I don't think this will be helpful in pulling us together in the long run.

EIR: Would you like to see any particular changes in the rules of the party?

Stenholm: I think it's absolutely imperative that we have a reform of the rules of the Democratic Party. Beginning in the late sixties and early seventies has begun the demise of the Democratic Party in my opinion. I participated in Texas in the Democratic Party and have seen the same thing occur on the state level that has occurred on the national level. The rules, the regulations, the reforms, the McGovern rules. All of this has contributed to the demise of the Democratic Party, and I think that it's only realistic for us to look—sitting down and re-evaluating and seeing what we can do to make the best of a bad situation.

EIR: Looking ahead to the 1982 mid-term convention, is there anything specific in terms of platform changes or rules changes that you would like to get out of that?

Stenholm: Well, I would like to see a Democratic platform that addressed productivity . . . that stressed the revival of the free-enterprise system, that stressed the importance of American jobs. . . . I would like to see concern expressed about the economy rather than a continuation of the concern with the social issues.

I happen to be one of those who believes that we can best solve our social problems by re-addressing America's problems in the manner in which our forefathers intended the free-enterprise system to work.