

Oklahoma and the Democratic Whip

By CARL ALBERT

THE most important event in my Congressional career occurred January 4, 1955, when Majority Leader John McCormack invited me to become Democratic Whip of the United States House of Representatives.

I was in my office that morning going through the usual routine of answering mail and seeing visitors. Although the first session of the 84th Congress would not officially open for another 24 hours, the volume of mail and the number of visitors already were increasing. There was every indication that this would be a busy year for me.

Little did I know at that moment how busy it was really going to be. I had given no thought whatever to any new and additional duties before my secretary stuck her head inside my office to say that John McCormack wanted to see me right away in his office.

I remember wondering at the time what the Democratic Leader might want. But since I had no idea at all, there was no point in speculating. I simply headed for his office as any other Congressman would do when summoned by Mr. McCormack.

The details of what happened then are a little blurred in my memory now because it all seemed to happen so fast. I do know Mr. McCormack went straight to the point: he advised me that he and the Speaker had been conferring on the matter of selection of a Democratic Whip, that several members from all sections of the country had been considered, and they had decided to ask me to take the job.

It would be the understatement of the year to say that I was surprised. For just about the first time in my life, I was practically speechless. It sounds a little silly now, but my first impulse was to ask, "Who, me?"

After recovering from the initial shock, I asked about the details of the job, how much time it would take, and what additional staff would be provided. These questions apparently were answered to my satisfaction; at any rate, I soon found myself saying I would be honored to take on the additional responsibility.

Later that day, Mr. Rayburn and Mr.

McCormack announced to Democratic House members assembled in a party caucus that Carl Albert of Oklahoma would be the Democratic Whip in the 84th Congress. That settled the matter.

Now I have been in the job for some five months. It has been arduous and at times very trying, but never dull. For the first time in my eight and one-half years in Congress I have had an opportunity to sit in on meetings where Democratic policy is discussed at the highest level. I have attended briefing sessions at the White House and State Department; I have been called upon to assume responsibilities of leadership that I had never even thought about a few months ago.

Having said that, let me quickly add that being Whip does not mean I have suddenly become somebody special. I still have my regular Congressional duties to perform, such as answering mail, seeing visitors, making speeches, attending committee meetings, and studying legislation. My primary obligation still is to my constituents in the Third Congressional District of Oklahoma.

The term "Whip" has an interesting history. It was first used in the British Parliament around 1770 and had its origin in the hunting term "whipper-in." The whipper-in was the huntsman assigned the job

of keeping the hounds from roaming. When members of Parliament began using the term to apply to the person designated to round up votes, the name was shortened to "Whip."

Soon after the American Congress was organized, a corresponding need was found for one member of each party to act as an agent of the leadership to secure the attendance of members on the floor when an important issue was being debated. It was logical that the office of the Whip soon became a fixture in the American governmental system just as it had become in the British.

Actually, there are four men designated as Whips in Congress—Democratic and Republican Whips in the Senate and Democratic and Republican Whips in the House.

In the House, the leadership chain of command begins with the Speaker. He, of course, is the presiding officer. Then there is the Majority Leader, who is the Speaker's right hand man. The Whip often is referred to as the Assistant Leader.

It is the Whip's job to be present on the House floor most of the time the House is in session. He helps the Majority Leader keep tab on legislation, and he keeps the members advised of the legislature schedule. He attempts to make sure the members of his party are on the floor when a significant vote is imminent. On occasion the Whip joins the Speaker and the Majority Leader in seeking to round up votes on an important issue.

On three of the most important bills before the present Congress our majority was less than ten votes, and the bills were passed only after terrific battles both on and off the floor. Our working majority in the House is extremely small, and I have had to cut my eye teeth on my new duties at a time when

About the Author



While Carl Albert was a student in the University, he was, among other things, a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Kappa Alpha, president of the Men's Council, and winner of first place in the National Oratorical Contest. His career since leaving the University with a B.A. in 1931 has been even more distinguished. He was a Rhodes Scholar from 1931 to 1934, receiving his B.A. in 1933 and his Bachelor of Civil Laws in 1934. He practiced law until he entered the Service in June 1941. He went overseas in 1944, being stationed in Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan, and receiving the Bronze Star in recognition of the distinction with which he discharged his duties as staff judge advocate and the legal assistance he gave in the Far East Air Command. He was discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1945. He was first elected to Congress in 1947 as Representative from the Third Oklahoma District. His selection as Democratic Whip is a great compliment to himself and Oklahoma.

the job of the leadership is unusually difficult.

I recall very vividly the many hours of work we put in recently on legislation proposing to restore a 90 per cent price support program for basic agricultural commodities. I was particularly interested in getting the House to approve that bill—I am a member of the Agriculture Committee, in addition to my other duties—and I spent a good many hours sounding out members on it. Our hard work paid dividends because the House approved the bill by a margin of five votes, the final vote being 206 to 201.

We of course knew in advance that the vote on the agriculture bill was going to be very close. Another of the functions of the Whip is to poll the members of his party on important legislation and to arrive at a fairly accurate estimate of the final outcome.

We are quite proud of the record we have made in our polls. We were able to determine in advance that we should be able to carry the agriculture bill by a very narrow margin. Our forecast on a tax bill vote earlier in the session was equally accurate; we found that it too would be approved by a close vote. We try to be as accurate as possible in our polls because it would be embarrassing to get a bill to the floor that is important from a party standpoint, and then to have it defeated.

Although my job of Whip has meant longer hours and harder work for me, there has been a compensating side, too. I have derived a great deal of personal satisfaction out of the results we have been able to obtain in the House in this session of Congress. It has been an illuminating experience.

Another feature that has made the job particularly attractive is the opportunity to work closely with Speaker Rayburn, the man known in Washington as "Mr. Democrat." I have long admired Mr. Rayburn for his skill as a legislator, for his eloquence as a speaker, and for his unusual ability to take charge in a particularly difficult situation and swing the House toward his viewpoint.

My new position has enabled me to observe Mr. Rayburn at close range. This in itself has been worth the additional burden entailed in being Whip.

I also have worked closely with the Majority Leader, John McCormack of Massachusetts, a veteran of many legislative battles and an "old pro" when it comes to almost any aspect of Congressional proceedings. This association has been very pleasant and, from my standpoint, quite fruitful because I have learned a lot from him too.

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THE 1954 ELECTION and the EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

By CORTEZ A. M. EWING

THE election of 1954 was both an emancipation and an enslavement. Freeing America, temporarily at least, from the tyranny of inference and innuendo, the voters were decisive in restoring politics to traditional healthy partisanship. In this regard, the 1954 election was the most important off-year election within the memory of even our oldest citizens, because it marked the triumph of the idea of decency in what Mr. Spender calls the public life.

Not since the unregretted passing of the Reconstruction era had a majority political party suffered the indignity of being smeared with the swill of disloyalty. In the distorted perspectives of the Nixons, McCarthys, Reeces, and others of that careless breed, the emergence of Russia as a world power and the victory of the United States were totally unrelated phenomena. We should have won the war without permitting Russia to profit by it, a dispensation devoutly to be wished, since it would have prevented the borning of the harassments of contemporary world politics. I deem it natural that men, and states, should aspire to the rewards of heaven both before and after the trauma of dying. But the ticket-taker at the gates of the heavenly city should be permitted the authority of denying entrance to those bearing forged credentials, otherwise the amenities of heavenly decency will be attenuated by the Appleton ethics.

It is extremely dangerous to representative democratic institutions to stigmatize the only visible opposition as a party of treason. A technique of temporary advantage, it explodes in the face of its practitioners, for when the government loses the confidence of the country, which may result, as in 1952, for no tangible reason other than the desire for new faces on the Washington scene, the incoming government possesses the mandate to implement a treat-

sonable program. Therefore, such tactics of branding the opposition as treasonable, become treasonable *per se*, and violate the very *raison d'être* of political parties themselves, for parties are presumably organized for the public good and none would be so obscurantist as to contend that what was good for the Republican Party was inevitably good for the country.

The perpetrators of this neo-authoritarianism may be excused upon the ground that they do not understand their moral obligations under our non-ideological party system or, at least, their actions would seem to imply that they were prepared to substitute an ideological system for it. The tender sapling of the middle thirties had, by 1950, become as menacing as Daniel Leonard's great tree of sedition. As he said, the vilest reptiles were concealed at its roots, the foulest birds roosted in its branches. It shaded the fallow of American patriotism and was prepared, like all irreverent ideas, to cover the earth with its own imperialistic adumbration.

The germ for this American brand of authoritarianism appeared in the first years of the New Deal experiment. It developed out of the inability of the opposition to understand the plain facts of political life. Somehow, the timbers had fallen about their ears, destruction lay all about them, and, the worst of it, a majority of American citizens regarded the rubble as an evidence of social progress. These outraged purists, not numerous until joined by those who had nightmares about the Sovietization of the entire world, refused to make peace with the *Zeitgeist* of America. In its incidence, this was the most important aspect of the New Deal era—the failure of some members of the opposition to recognize the plain facts of history. In the words of Bernard de Voto, "They resented the Twentieth Century." After three of their presidential

possibility, and in view, further, of the present inadequacies of United States-Canadian air defense, the need to develop our capabilities to operate effectively in the Arctic is *imperative*. Time is of the essence—and to again quote Colonel Fletcher, "It may be later than we think." It is certain that *only* the fullest and most dedicated effort on the part of both military and scientific-technological personnel will successfully off-set the problem posed by Soviet Russia's tremendous trans-Polar striking capabilities.

What Civilians Can Contribute . . .

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subordinate personal interest for the good of the whole.

You must insure that our young men are not living in a vacuum aloof and oblivious to the great moral issues confronting us. Do not let them be too busy with their academic studies or too preoccupied with the ease of our current way of life to exercise their ability to think and to reason and to be aware of the inescapable fact that the actual survival of their country and their own freedom is at stake today. Make our youth constantly aware of the great efforts in behalf of freedom which have been undertaken by this country solely in the interest of freedom and which have been based primarily on our belief in the rights and the dignity of the individual human being.

We must endow our youth with an extinguishable faith in God and an unquenchable love of freedom under God. As long as they harbor a burning determination to preserve their heritage of freedom, then no weapons—material or spiritual—can conquer them. We would like these young men to come to us with pride in service. We would like them to have been imbued with a sense of privilege, not of obligation. We would like them to come with the spirit of those hundreds of thousands of gallant men who, in each of our crises, saw the shape of things as they were, and stood up to them in defense of their faith.

The road ahead of America is very simple and very clear. It is whether our country will survive as a free nation or disappear.

We have the best weapons in the world, and the Army and other elements of the Armed Forces will do everything within their power to insure that this Nation does survive. The choice, however, does not lie entirely within the grasp of the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces are no stronger than the conviction and the understanding of those who create them, support them, and depend upon them for protection.

The real decision will not be made on

the field of battle. The decision will be made in our homes, our churches, and our schools where the weapons of the spirit are made. The weapons of faith and honor must be forged from the very outset at home and, if necessary, in the woodshed; they must be tempered and edged in the school and in the church. Without marked improvement in these fundamental weapons, our men will continue to succumb to Communist pressures, whenever and wherever they are exposed to them. A morally strong America will never be defeated.

If you will give us men, we will make them soldiers.

The Democratic Whip . . .

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In a purely personal way, there is no question but that my new duties have made this the most satisfying year I have yet spent in Congress. As the conclusion of the current session draws near, I already find myself looking forward to the opening of a new session next year, and to the new experiences that I know lie ahead.

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