

Recess Ends for Congress

Nixon-Hill Relations Facing Uncertainty

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By Mary Russell
Washington Post Staff Writer

Congress returns from its long August holiday Wednesday to face a period of uncertain relationships with the White House and President Nixon.

It is likely that there will be further confrontations in the weeks ahead over such issues as minimum wages, health services and presidential war powers.

But it is also likely that there will be some White House efforts to improve the dialogue between the legislative and executive branches. One presidential assistant reported last week-end that Mr. Nixon intends to "help energize" the lawmakers and "point the way" toward the solution of outstanding problems.

A congressional speech by the President is not contemplated, this assistant said, but various White House ini-

tiatives are being considered—"a compote of things."

Another presidential aide said a message to Congress is probable in which Mr. Nixon will outline the 25 or 30 pieces of legislation he would like to have enacted. Other probable initiatives include a Cabinet meeting, a meeting with congressional leaders and—perhaps within a week—another presidential news conference.

Thus far in 1973, relations between the White House and Congress have been rocky. Congress has acted favorably on only a small percentage of the President's requests.

On the other hand, all four presidential vetoes of 1973 have been sustained. More vetoes are expected. In these struggles the odds

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are with the President's Hill allies. He needs only 146 votes to sustain a veto and there are 192 Republicans in the House, as well as many sympathetic Democrats.

How much support he will be able to muster in the battles to come will depend in part on what congressmen learned about the President's popularity and about the public mood during the August recess.

While Congress doesn't deserve any medals for what it has accomplished so far, neither does it deserve Mr. Nixon's brickbat that it's been so tied up with Watergate it's neglecting its regular business.

Despite the President's claim during his Aug. 15 Watergate speech that "legislation vital to your health and well-being sits unattended on the congressional calendar" because Congress is preoccupied with Watergate, this year's performance is about par-

with other first-year sessions.

That is, most of what Congress has to do remains to be done.

But a Congressional Quarterly survey comparing the sheer volume of work—committee reports, roll call votes, hours in session and number of important bills enacted or approved by either or both houses shows the 93d Congress at this point far ahead of some other Congresses and equal to most.

The first confrontation with the President will come during the early part of this month on two bills—the minimum wage bill and an Emergency Medical Services Act.

The Senate on Aug. 2 voted to override the President's veto, but in the House a vote on the veto was delayed until Sept. 12 so House supporters of the bill could garner votes.

The bill authorizes \$185 million through fiscal 1976 for emergency medical care and keeps open eight Public Health Service hospitals the President wants closed.

It has the tacit support of the American Medical Association which, if it actively backed the bill, could change some Republican votes.

Action was completed by both houses on the minimum wage bill, which raises the minimum wage to \$2.20 an hour for most workers by July 1, 1974, before the August recess. But the bill wasn't sent to the President until last week to avoid a pocket veto, since the President considers the wage raise too much, too soon.

Other bills likely to attract a presidential veto are those which set limits on presidential authority.

A war powers bill would limit the President's authority to send troops into action without Congress' approval.

Another bill would prohibit the President from impounding funds appropriated by Congress and a third would require that the director and deputy director of the President's Office of Management and Budget be confirmed by the Senate.

The President vetoed an earlier bill which required that the present director and deputy director of OMB be confirmed.

Bills already passed by Congress and signed by the President include a farm bill giving subsidies only if the market price falls below a certain level; a highway bill allowing Highway Trust Fund money to be used for mass transit construction and equipment in the third year; a bill increasing Social Security benefits by 5.6 per cent; a one-year extension of the President's authority to impose wage and price controls; an extension of the \$465 billion federal debt ceiling to Nov. 30, and a bill extending the grant-giving authority of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for three years.

But bills awaiting final action far outnumber those enacted. They include an education bill, a foreign aid bill, a campaign finance reform bill, a voter registration bill, the trade reform bill, an Alaska pipeline bill, a land use bill, a no-fault insurance bill, a housing bill and major appropriations bills.

Presidential counselor Melvin R. Laird said key bills on which the White House will concentrate include the trade reform bill, two special revenue-sharing

bills—a substitute education bill and the Better Communities Act—and a bill to create an independent corporation for legal services.

A priority for the Hill itself is a proposal to help Congress get a grip on the way it deals with the budget. A proposal would set up two new budget committees which would set spending ceiling and allocate spending priorities within it.

Neither house has acted on the budget reform proposal yet, but both chambers are expected to push the measure this fall.

One other thorny problem for the President will be approval of aid for a reconstruction program for North Vietnam.

No formal request for such aid has been sent to Congress by the President though the figure \$7.5 billion over five years has been talked about.

Still Congress has already expressed its disapproval by adopting amendments barring aid for North Vietnam to several bills where Congress suspected the President might use the money for that purpose even though Congress didn't approve.

One bright prospect for the President is that his nomination of Henry A. Kissinger to be Secretary of State seems to be in no serious trouble, even though Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) has announced he is wary of the President's intention to keep Kissinger in his national security affairs adviser post.