

Washington Merry-go-round

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F. Paul 8/11/77

WASHINGTON — The Library of Congress offers our national legislators more than books to borrow. It also provides a research service whose 500 harried researchers will check out anything that might arouse a congressman's curiosity, no matter how idle.

What would House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill like to know about Swiss bank accounts? Are there some historical tidbits about the Hudson Valley that Rep. Hamilton Fish Jr., R-N.Y., could slyly drop as he travels around the area?

Would someone please complete a school project for the daughter of Rep. Ronald Bo Ginn, D-Ga.? How can Vice President Walter Mondale find a foreign pen pal for a constituent? What should Rep. Daniel Flood, D.-Pa., say to the Wyoming Valley Catholic Laymen's Retreat League?

Whatever the inquisitive folks on Capitol Hill want to know, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) will try to find the answers. Upon request, the researchers will spend up to 50 hours on a single project. They handle upwards of 300,000 congressional inquiries annually, a service that costs the taxpayers about \$20 million a year.

All the answers are confidential and unavailable to the taxpayers who pay for the research. A CRS spokesman conceded that most of the inquiries are proper requests for information that congressmen need in their work. But some of the confidential requests we have seen are questionable.

Some members of Congress have used the researchers, for example, to help privileged youngsters with their schoolwork. Rep. Ronald Bo Ginn's

daughter needed some overnight research on prison reforms to meet a school deadline. Explains the confidential request slip: "For Member's college-age daughter for a school project... a good bibliography would also be useful."

A spokesman said the research was really prepared for a friend of the congressman's daughter. It may have been improper, the spokesman conceded, to ask the CRS to expedite the research. But he insisted it was "appropriate" to request information for school-aged constituents.

Sen. Robert Byrd, D.-W. Va., would agree. He has asked the research service to provide his student constituents with everything from the state song of Georgia to charts of the United States. And Sen. Herman Talmadge, D.-Ga., ordered the CRS to help one of his aide's offspring with college homework on the judicial system.

Some legislators have sought personal information from the research service. Sen. Robert Dole, R.-Kan., the 1976 Republican vice presidential candidate, asked CRS for a genealogy of his family.

From Speaker Tip O'Neill's office came a hush-hush request for information about Swiss bank accounts. The researcher not only was informed it was "for personal use" but was also instructed not to submit a written response. He obediently telephoned the answers to O'Neill's office, but first he wrote down the questions on a confidential request slip:

"If staffer had funds in a Swiss bank and died, what problems would be encountered in the inheritor's getting the

money into the U.S.?" And this one: "If staffer had property in Bermuda and died, would estate taxes have to be paid to both Bermuda and Britain; or is there some kind of reciprocal agreement? What problems would there be?"

A spokesman suggested the questions must have come from a constituent. The speaker also requested the score of the musical, "Carnival." Vice President Mondale wanted to know how a young constituent could find a foreign pen pal, age 13 to 16, preferably in Switzerland. And Rep. Elliott Levitas, D.-Ga., asked for the recipe for Mongolian beef.

Several members of Congress use the CRS to write their speeches. Rep. Daniel Flood has requested a few heartfelt words for every conceivable occasion from a Masonic ordination to the dedication of an Easter Seal Society hospital. On one occasion, he requested separate speeches for a Wyoming Valley monument meeting and a communion breakfast before the Wyoming Valley Catholic Laymen's Retreat League.

Apparently, Sen. Hubert Humphrey, D.-Minn., even has a favorite speechwriter at CRS. His office specified that Lise Nickerson should write a 30-minute speech for Humphrey to deliver to the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Rep. Hamilton Fish Jr., had a delicate problem, which a request slip explained

thusly: "Member, who is a Republican, is scheduled to speak before an all-Democratic group. Seems he is addressing a group in a subdivision of New York that has recently swept all Republicans out of office. Wants us to prepare 2-3 pages of 'tongue and cheek' remarks, i.e., a light congratulatory address."

Fish also wanted to impress voters in the Hudson Valley with his profound knowledge of the area. Explained a confidential slip: "By Friday, (Fish) would like material on bicentennial happenings in the (mid-Hudson Valley). Member would like to be able to throw out little facts while visiting in the district during recess — 'Well, in 1776 in Cold Springs, thus and such happened!!'" He also requested 1,200 to 1,500 well-chosen words comparing the Egyptian and Cuban revolutions.

With 500 researchers to call upon, our solemn solons sometimes can appear to be wiser than they are.

WHO'S NEWS — Leon Jaworski, the former Watergate prosecutor who is now trying to get to the bottom of the Korean scandal, has been griping to confidants about Attorney General Griffin Bell. The moment Jaworski was appointed, he grumped, Bell suddenly began briefing congressmen about his own Korean investigation. Jaworski suspects the Attorney General is trying to grab credit in advance for any successes.