

A Congressman With Style

9/21/76

By Richard L. Lyons
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If Hollywood were casting a movie about an All-American congressman it would come up with someone like New York Democrat Otis G. Pike.

Tall and handsome, witty, good writer, fine speaker, political moderate, Marine pilot, acclaimed for spotlighting Pentagon waste through independent investigations.

Pike would like people to think of him as patient and tough. The trait he values most in a public official is stamina.

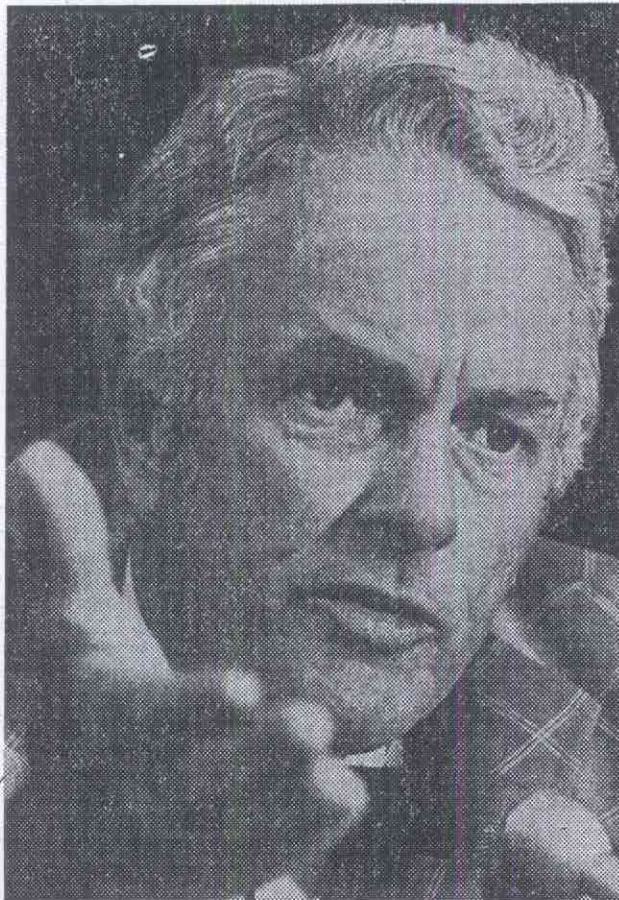
He will need all those virtues in the chair of the House Committee on Intelligence, which he took over in July to end bickering that had stalled the investigation of alleged improper activities by the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

Product of Princeton and Columbia law school, Pike came to the House in 1961 from the easternmost district on Long Island. It was then and is now predominantly Republican but Pike appears safe.

He was a justice of the peace when he ousted a Republican, partly on the issue of absenteeism. Pike vowed he would never be vulnerable to the same charge and—unlike many long-weekend New Yorkers—he has a near-perfect attendance record.

He has been critical of Congress on grounds that its committees are not representative of Congress or the nation as a whole. The Judiciary Committee is all lawyers wanting to be judges, he once said. The Agriculture Committee is loaded with farm state members and the Armed Services Committee with friends of the military, several holding high-ranking commissions in the reserves.

"The House Armed Services Committee doesn't control the Pentagon; the Pentagon controls the House



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

New York Rep. Otis G. Pike: "The House Armed Services Committee doesn't control the Pentagon; the Pentagon controls the House Armed Services Committee."

Armed Services Committee," Pike told an interviewer several years ago. The committee "should say 'No' once in a while," he said.

Pike has worked hard for Long Island defense contractors and is proud of his role in establishing Fire Island as a national seashore—"31 miles out there that will be there for my grandchildren."

He has voted for civil rights, poverty, urban renewal and environmental legislation. He has voted against a bill to bail out the Lockheed Corp. He voted for tough anti-crime provisions such as no-knock entry in the D.C. crime law. He voted to cut off federal aid to students disrupting college campuses in the late 1960s, but also voted against a bill that would have made

it a crime to stage protests at the Pentagon.

One politician described Pike in these words: "He runs for office as a Democrat, is elected by Republicans, has liberal leanings and a conservative approach."

Now, 54, Pike is as close to the middle of the road as a politician can get. In 1971 the conservative Americans for Constitutional Action gave him a 48 per cent rating while liberal Americans for Democratic Action gave him 58 per cent. "I can usually see both sides of an issue," said Pike. "It makes my work a lot harder." His great political hero was Adlai Stevenson, who had the same problem.

Pike flopped in a bid for the Senate nomination in 1968 and said he wouldn't try again. But there is talk that if Pike does a good job with the CIA investigation he may be pushed to run next year against Sen. James L. Buckley (Cons. R-N.Y.), who is now leading all other likely Democratic contenders in the polls.

As a World War II combat pilot and with many constituents working in defense industries, Pike went on the House Armed Services Committee, where he became its sharpest critic of Pentagon waste in large ways and small.

He fought the Cheyenne helicopter which was dumped, the huge C-5 cargo

plane which was built, and the B-1 bomber which is slowly moving forward as a replacement of the B-52.

Pike had an abrasive relationship with Rep. L. Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.), late chairman of the Armed Services Committee, who pushed him off the investigating subcommittee for being uppity.

But Rep. F. Edward Herbert (D-La.), who succeeded Rivers and shared his view that the Pentagon does no wrong, gave Pike good assignments. He conducted the investigation of the capture of the spy ship Pueblo. He also pushed into the open the story that the top U.S. Air Force general in Indochina, Gen. John D. Lavelle, had ordered unauthorized bombing raids, for which he was relieved and lost one star.

Warring against Pentagon waste in buying small part replacements at exorbitant prices, Pike made daily one-minute floor speeches about various outrages. He found in one case the Pentagon was paying \$25.55 for metal rods worth 50 cents. They were described in the catalogue as "precision shafting."

"For once," Pike told the House, "the American taxpayer got precisely what he paid for."

Pike has as keen a wit as any House member, with an articulateness and style that make him one of the few

members whom others really like to hear talk. "There's adequate room in politics for a man who takes his work seriously but not himself," says Pike.

Two years ago Pike shot down a bill to contingently pay for desk-bound generals. In House debate he described with appropriate arms-spread gestures the difficulties of flying a desk. He asked the House to consider the plight of Rear Adm. J. Heavy Bottomley, who spun too fast in his swivel chair when he heard he might lose his flight pay and went out the open window into orbit.

Pike writes his own stuff, including a weekly newsletter to the homefolks that is always good for some chuckles.

"I'd like to be a writer in my next career, writing a political column," Pike said in a recent interview. His heroes include sports columnist Red Smith and humor columnist Art Buchwald.

While on the Armed Services Committee, Pike often sought to learn about new military planes by going up with a pilot and taking the controls himself. He carefully notes that he never took off or landed one of the sophisticated jets. His own 120 combat missions in the 1940s were all in slower, simpler propeller-driven planes.

For recreation, Pike pilots a 30-year-old Navy launch (a big rowboat) which he bought and converted into a fishing craft.

Last December Pike moved off Armed Services to the House Ways and Means Committee, where because of its expansion he stands in the middle on the seniority ladder. He said he moved off Armed Services where he stood closer to the chairmanship because "it seemed I had done all I could there. I'd fought all the battles. The war was over, and I felt the most important issues now would be economic."

Speaker Carl Albert named Pike to the reconstructed intelligence committee in July and appointed him chairman.