

6/15/92

In Wake of Watergate, Reformers Charged Hill

But Class of '74 Now Draws Some Fire

By John E. Yang
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Class of '74—the army of reform-minded lawmakers swept into the House of Representatives in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal—still is regarded with reverence by many on Capitol Hill. They were 92 strong, the largest number of House freshmen since 1948. They were relatively young and inexperienced, and they were sent to Washington to change things.

Change things they did. Challenging the strict seniority rules of the House, they toppled once-powerful southern Democratic committee chairmen. They spread power more broadly through a proliferation of new subcommittees and a dramatic enlargement of congressional staffs. They helped enact sweeping campaign contribution and financial disclosure changes.

The changes, and the sense of achievement they felt, are among the most enduring legacies of the discovery of the Watergate burglary 20 years ago this week.

"It was a glory time," said class member Sen. Timothy E. Wirth (D-Colo.), who is retiring this year. "There was a tremendous sense of mutual mission. You really had a sense of why you were there and what you were doing. . . . Not at all like now."

Now, nearly two decades later, the accomplishments of the Class of '74 are seen by critics as having contributed significantly—if unintentionally—to governmental gridlock in Washington. And voter discontent with Congress and the way it works promises to produce another generational turnover on Capitol Hill.

"All they did was screw it up,"

See CLASS, A6, Col. 1

former president Gerald R. Ford, a former House minority leader, said in a recent speech about the impact of the Class of '74 on Congress. "They took away the benefits of seniority, which [had] created stability. . . . They undercut the capability of the leadership, both Democrat and Republican. . . . The net result is the House, in my judgment, has lost its capability to effectively handle the problems that are on its doorstep."

Fewer than half of the new lawmakers that year had legislative experience, the lowest percentage in a quarter-century. They brought the average age of House members below 50 for the first time since World War II. Seventy-five of them were Democrats, almost two-thirds holding seats that had been Republican.

Many of the freshmen Democrats were social activists who transferred their activism to Congress. Christopher J. Dodd (Conn.), now in the Senate, was a 30-year-old former Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. Connecticut colleague Toby Moffett, now a Washington lobbyist, was also 30 and had run a grass-roots citizens action group for Ralph Nader. Tom Harkin, also now in the Senate, was a 34-year-old legal aid attorney in Iowa.

The class included some of today's most influential lawmakers: Interior Committee Chairman George Miller (D-Calif.); Rep. Willis D. Gradison Jr. (Ohio), the ranking Republican on the Budget Committee and a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee, and Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif), chairman of the Energy and Commerce subcommittee on health and the environment.

"We were such a large class," Waxman said, "and so determined to be independent and to make a difference."

The new House Democrats first met as a group one bone-chilling December day in 1974 in the old Congressional Hotel in the shadow of the House office buildings. One by one, each told how he—there were just four women—had gotten there and what each wanted to do. They spoke of ending the war in Vietnam and overhauling the House, which, because of the seniority system, was dominated by conservative southerners, most of whom occupied safe seats.

They had the voting strength to do most of what they wanted. They represented more than a quarter of House Democrats and nearly a fifth of the entire House. They supplied the troops that veteran reformers needed to push through some of the broadest changes in House procedures in nearly three decades.

"We became the cannon fodder for these more-senior members," Rep. Norman Y. Mineta (D-Calif.) said.

"My God," Moffett recalled then-Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.) declaring at one meeting of House Democrats. "The reinforcements have arrived."

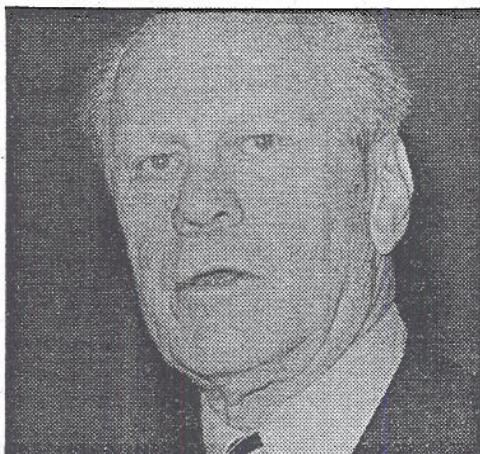
"There was a robust feeling of democracy in the group," said former representative Floyd J. Fithian (D-Ind.), a member of the Class of '74 who is now

I t was a glory time. . . . You really had a sense of why you were there and what you were doing. . . . Not at all like now. ¶



— SEN. TIMOTHY E. WIRTH (D-Colo.), a member of the 1974 House class

A ll they did was screw it up. . . . [The House today is] 435 prima donnas who have no allegiance to their party or their leaders. ¶



— FORMER PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD, a member of the House for 25 years

a top aide to his House classmate, Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.).

Sometimes, their early overhaul attempts dismayed them.

The freshmen Democrats, for example, decided to have a rotating chairmanship of the class selected by lot rather than by votes. The first winner: Rep. Carroll Hubbard Jr. (D-Ky.), a lackluster lawmaker—defeated on May 26 in a bid for renomination—who was more conservative and more out of the old-fashioned, “go-along-to-get-along” mold than his classmates. “The rules were rapidly changed,” Wirth said.

They turned their sights to the House power structure. “We wanted to keep the chairmen from having as much power as they did,” Waxman said. “We wanted to make sure the seniority system wasn’t absolute and that more power could be put in the hands of the Democratic caucus and the leaders, so important, progressive legislation could move.”

“We could be forgiven for not knowing that you didn’t do certain things—like take on the leadership,” said Fithian, who was a 46-year-old tenured associate professor of history at Purdue University inspired by Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign. “We went ahead and did these things not knowing they were impossible.”

House Democratic Caucus rules were changed to require that committee chairmen be elected by secret ballot at the beginning of each new Congress. Previously, one-fifth of the caucus was needed to force a vote on a chairman.

The Democratic Class of ’74 asked all the chairmen to address it in preparation for the vote. Most

refused. Then, the freshmen announced they would not vote for any chairman who did not comply. One by one, these proud, powerful lords of Congress, relented.

“It was a very heady experience,” said Waxman, “to have these old guys who had been ruling their committees with an iron hand coming to us with hat in hand.”

The late House Armed Services Committee Chairman F. Edward Hebert (D-La.) probably sealed his fate when he finally grew impatient with the grilling he was getting, rose from his seat and, leaning forward with his knuckles resting on the table before him, growled: “All right, boys and girls, let me tell you what it’s *really* like here.”

House Democrats ousted him, 144 to 141.

The Class of ’74’s numbers helped topple two other sitting chairmen. “That sent a thundershock through this institution,” said House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.), at the time a reform-minded, middle-ranking lawmaker. His colleagues tapped him to replace ousted House Agriculture Committee Chairman W.R. Poage (D-Tex.), No. 3 in House seniority.

In another attack on the power of committee chairmen, the caucus gave the full membership of each committee the power to determine the number of its subcommittees. And the subcommittee chairmen and ranking minority members were given the power to hire staff and control their own budgets, giving the subcommittees more independence from committee chairmen.

“They were very important changes,” Wirth said, “decentralizing power in the House, democratizing the House—all very appropriate things at that time.”

In 1975, there were 151 subcommittees of standing committees where there had been 120 in 1972; today there are 135.

It was also the beginning of the tremendous

growth in lawmakers' staffs, spurred in part by other changes that allowed the larger number of subcommittee chairmen and ranking Republican members to hire their own staffs. House committee and subcommittee staff went from 702 in 1970 to 1,917 in 1980.

Today, Congress is the most heavily staffed legislature in the world, with more than 31,000 employees—more than either the State, Labor or Housing and Urban Development departments—compared with about 19,000 in 1972. By contrast, the 650 members of the British House of Commons get by with about 1,000 employees, albeit in a parliamentary system with a relatively small and powerless committee structure.

While these changes, all in the name of making the House more democratic, were widely lauded, there is now a feeling among many that they also contributed to make it more unwieldy and difficult to manage in a variety of ways.

Some bills must run a gantlet of as many as 10 committees and subcommittees. The multiplication of committees and subcommittees produced a tangle of overlapping committee and subcommittee jurisdictions. Nine different House panels, for instance, had to approve the sweeping energy bill—chiefly designed by Class of '74 member Rep. Philip R. Sharp (D-Ind.)—that the House passed three weeks ago. And, because panels' jurisdictions are vaguely defined, ambitious chairmen—and ambitious staff—are eager to expand their purview.

The members themselves—with much greater resources at their disposal and little incentive to "go along" with the leadership—became far more independent. With armies of aides to write speeches and press releases, research issues and draft amendments, almost any lawmaker today can and does try to affect legislation on almost any issue.

"The long run effect has been to make it more difficult for the leadership in Congress Nobody wants to follow," said Richard F. Fenno Jr., a congressional scholar at the University of Rochester.

Gerald Ford, a member of the House for a quarter-century before becoming Richard M. Nixon's vice president, said in his speech that "you can't run an institution . . . if you don't have some power over the members of your party on critical and crucial issues." The House today, he said, is "435 prima donnas up there who have no allegiance to their party or their leaders."

Looking back on their work, some of the Class of '74 see the shortcomings of the changes. "It's made the House more difficult to administer, to govern, to lead," Fithian said. But, he said, "An open and more free, more democratic system is not efficient. Democracies are not efficient; they never were intended to be."

The proliferation of subcommittees has "prob-

ably contributed to the logjam that we have here," said Mineta, now chairman of the Public Works subcommittee on surface transportation. "You've got this dispersion of power and increased jurisdictions. It has been part of the problem here."

"It was appropriate for the time," Wirth said. "But what's good in one era may not be good in another."

Others say the criticisms are not justified. The breakdown of party discipline "was happening anyway," Moffett said. "It may have exacerbated it, but it certainly didn't give rise to it."

"The problems we have now are bigger than just structure," said Waxman, citing a government in which the executive and legislative branches are ruled by different parties and a campaign finance system that encourages lawmakers to pander for special-interest money.

Nearly 20 years later, the Class of '74 is older, wiser and, in some cases, frustrated and angry. Twenty-eight have been defeated for reelection to the House, including two so far this year. Twenty-four chose not to seek reelection to the House—some to seek higher office—and three are retiring this year. Four were caught in scandal, including two who became ensnared in Abscam. (One other, former representative George V. Hansen (R-Idaho), was convicted in 1984 of failing to report his wife's dealings with Texas billionaire Nelson Bunker Hunt on his House financial disclosure forms. (Hansen was the first person convicted under the 1978 Ethics in Government Act—a post-Watergate change for which he did not vote.) Nine of them had more than 100 overdrafts each from the House Bank between July 1, 1988, and Oct. 3, 1991, this year's Capitol Hill scandal.

Staff researcher Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report.

UPHEAVAL IN THE HOUSE

The Watergate scandal brought about a momentous upheaval in the House of Representatives. When the 94th Congress convened in January 1975, 92 new members took seats in the House: 75 Democrats and 17 Republicans. The "Watergate class," as the freshmen were soon dubbed, pushed through major changes in the House seniority system, allowing some to rise quickly to positions of power. But many found themselves out of office within a decade, including a few caught up in scandals of their own.

THE SURVIVORS

NOW IN THE SENATE

Max Baucus (D-Mont., took office 1979), Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn., 1981), Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa, 1981), Tom Harkin (D-Iowa, 1985), James M. Jeffords (R-Vt., 1989), Robert W. Kasten Jr. (R-Wis., 1981), Larry Pressler (R-S.D., 1979), Paul Simon (D-Ill., 1985), Timothy E. Wirth (D-Colo., 1987, and is retiring).

STILL IN THE HOUSE

Les AuCoin (D-Ore., running for Senate), Bob Carr (D-Mich.), Butler C. Derrick (D-S.C.), Thomas J. Downey (D-N.Y.), Joseph D. Early (D-Mass.), Glenn English (D-Okla.), Harold E. Ford (D-Tenn.), William F. Goodling (R-Pa.), Willis D. Gradison Jr. (R-Ohio), W.G. (Bill) Hefner (D-N.C.), Carroll Hubbard Jr. (D-Ky., lost in primary), William J. Hughes (D-N.J.), Henry J. Hyde (R-Ill.), Andrew Jacobs Jr. (D-Ind.), John J. LaFalce (D-N.Y.), Marilyn Lloyd (D-Tenn.), Matthew F. McHugh (D-N.Y., retiring), George Miller (D-Calif.), Norman Y. Mineta (D-Calif.), Stephen L. Neal (D-N.C.), Henry J. Nowak (D-N.Y.), James L. Oberstar (D-Minn.), Marty Russo (D-Ill., lost in primary), James H. Scheuer (D-N.Y.), Richard T. Schulze (R-Pa., retiring), Philip R. Sharp (D-Ind.), Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.), Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.).



GRADISON: ranking Republican on Budget Committee; serves on Ways and Means Committee



MINETA: chairman of Public Works and Transportation subcommittee on surface transportation



MILLER: chairman of Interior and Insular Affairs Committee



WAXMAN: chairman of Energy and Commerce subcommittee on health and the environment

THE DEPARTED

Name	Years Served	What Happened Next:
Jerome A. Ambros Jr. (D-N.Y.)	'75-'81	lost to Gregory W. Carman
Alvin J. Baldus (D-Wis.)	'75-'81	lost to Steven Gunderson
Edward P. Beard (D-R.I.)	'75-'81	lost to Claudine Schneider
Berkley W. Bedell (D-Iowa)	'75-'87	retired
James J. Blanchard (D-Mich.)	'75-'83	elected governor of Michigan
Michael T. Blouin (D-Iowa)	'75-'79	lost to Tom Tauke
Don Bonker (D-Wash.)	'75-'89	ran for Senate, lost in primary
William M. Brodhead (D-Mich.)	'75-'83	retired
Robert J. Cornell (D-Wis.)	'75-'79	lost to Tobias A. Roth
Norman E. D'Amours (D-N.H.)	'75-'85	ran for Senate, lost to Gordon J. Humphrey
Robert Duncan (D-Ore.)	'75-'81	lost in primary
Robert W. Edgar (D-Pa.)	'75-'87	ran for Senate, lost to Arlen Specter
David F. Emery (R-Maine)	'75-'83	ran for Senate, lost to George J. Mitchell
David W. Evans (D-Ind.)	'75-'83	lost in primary
Millicent Fenwick (R-N.J.)	'75-'83	ran for Senate, lost to Frank R. Lautenberg

Joseph L. Fisher (D-Va.)	'75-'81	lost to Frank R. Wolf
Floyd J. Fithian (D-Ind.)	'75-'83	ran for Senate, lost to Richard G. Lugar
James J. Florio (D-N.J.)	'75-'90	elected New Jersey governor
Tom Hagedorn (R-Minn.)	'75-'83	lost to Timothy J. Penny
Tim L. Hall (D-Ill.)	'75-'77	lost to Tom Corcoran
Mark W. Hannaford (D-Calif.)	'75-'79	lost to Daniel E. Lungren
Herbert E. Harris (D-Va.)	'75-'81	lost to Stanford Parris
Philip H. Hayes (D-Ind.)	'75-'77	ran for Senate, lost in primary
John Hightower (D-Tex.)	'75-'85	lost to Beau Boulter
Kenneth L. Holland (D-S.C.)	'75-'83	retired
Allan T. Howe (D-Utah)	'75-'77	lost to Dan Marriott
Martha E. Keys (D-Kan.)	'75-'79	lost to Jim Jeffries
Thomas N. Kindness (R-Ohio)	'75-'87	ran for Senate, lost to John Glenn
John Krebs (D-Calif.)	'75-'79	lost to Charles "Chip" Pashayan Jr.
Robert Krueger (D-Tex.)	'75-'79	ran for Senate, lost to John G. Tower
Elliott H. Levitas (D-Ga.)	'75-'85	lost to Patrick Lynn Swindall
Jim Lloyd (D-Calif.)	'75-'81	lost to David Dreier
Andrew Maguire (D-N.J.)	'75-'81	lost to Marge Roukema
Lawrence P. McDonald (D-Ga.)	'75-9/1/83	*
Helen S. Meyner (D-N.J.)	'75-'79	lost to Jim Courter
Abner J. Mikva (D-Ill.)	'75-9/26/79	resigned, named federal appeals judge
Toby J. Moffett (D-Conn.)	'75-'83	ran for Senate, lost to Lowell P. Weicker Jr.
W. Henson Moore III (R-La.)	'75-'87	ran for Senate, lost to John B. Breaux
Ronald M. Mottl (R-Ohio)	'75-'83	lost in primary
Gary A. Myers (R-Pa.)	'75-'79	retired
Richard Nolan (D-Minn.)	'75-'81	retired
Richard L. Ottinger (D-N.Y.)	'75-'85	retired
Jerry M. Patterson (D-Calif.)	'75-'85	lost to Robert K. Dorman
Edward W. Pattison (D-N.Y.)	'75-'79	lost to Gerald B. Solomon
Theodore M. Risenhoover (D-Okla.)	'75-'79	lost in primary
James Santini (D-Nev.)	'75-'83	ran for Senate, lost in primary
Virginia Smith (R-Neb.)	'75-'91	retired
Gladys N. Spellman (D-Md.)	'75-2/24/81	**
Paul E. Tsongas (D-Mass.)	'75-'79	won Senate seat, retired in '85
James Weaver (D-Ore.)	'75-'87	retired
Leo C. Zeferetti (D-N.Y.)	'75-'83	lost to Guy V. Molinari

*died Sept. 1, 1983, in office

**died June 19, 1988. After suffering a heart attack in October 1980, the House, for the first time, in 1981 approved a resolution declaring a vacancy because of a member's disability.

THE DISGRACED



George V. Hansen (R-Idaho) was convicted in 1984 of failing to list \$334,000 in loans and profits on his

financial disclosure statements, making him the first public official prosecuted under the 1978 Ethics in Government Act, enacted in the wake of the Watergate scandal. A few months later, Hansen lost his reelection bid by 170 votes and later served 11 months in prison.



Richard Kelly (R-Fla.) fell prey to the Abscam investigation. He was convicted of accepting \$25,000, but maintained that

he was innocent and only took the money because he was conducting his own investigation. He did not report the payoff and spent some of the money because, he said, he did not want to "blow his cover." He was defeated in the 1980 Florida primary and served 13 months in prison.



John W. Jenrette Jr. (D-S.C.) was convicted in October 1980 of conspiracy and bribery in an undercover investigation

known as Abscam. He accepted a \$50,000 bribe from an FBI agent posing as an Arab sheik and agreed in return to introduce an immigration bill. After losing in the 1980 general election, he served 13 months in prison.



Frederick W. Richmond (D-N.Y.) resigned from the House Aug. 25, 1982, and later pleaded guilty to income tax evasion, pos-

session of marijuana and making an illegal payment to a federal employee. He served nine months in prison.

Targeting Foreign Policy and Campaign Finances

In the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, Congress took various steps in hopes of preventing such executive branch excesses again. But in the ensuing years some of the ideas that supporters originally hailed as reforms have led the nation down some strange and ironic paths to unintended consequences.

Congress, for example, flexed its new-found muscle after President Richard M. Nixon's August 1974 resignation by adding provisions to spending bills that restricted President Gerald R. Ford's ability to exercise his foreign policy powers, particularly aid to anti-communist factions in foreign civil wars.

In 1975, the country in question was Angola. In 1985, it was Nicaragua, and then Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.) won inclusion of his eponymous amendment that restricted military aid to the contra rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government; it was repealed the next year.

Reagan administration attempts to get around the Boland Amendment led directly to the Iran-contra affair, the effort by White House aide Oliver L. North and others to sell arms to Iran in exchange for hostages, funneling the proceeds to the contras.

Conveniently, another post-Watergate-era measure was waiting in the wings to deal with that matter: the institution of the independent counsel, which was established by the Ethics in Government Act of 1978. The law was inspired by the "special prosecutors" of the Watergate days and based on the notion that the executive branch cannot always be trusted to investigate itself.

Independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh has been at work on the Iran-contra case since December 1986. (The same law—the Ethics in

Government Act—requires personal financial disclosure by high-ranking government officials.)

The finger-pointing over Iran-contra continues to this day, with some professing amazement that such a thing could happen after the lessons learned in Watergate. If only the Reagan administration had heeded the Boland Amendment, they say. If only there had never been a Boland Amendment, others say.

Even the independent counsel—both the man and the institution—has taken a share of criticism for prolonging the controversy. If only, they say, there had never been such a creature as an independent counsel. There is talk again of "reforming" the reform.

The only certain lesson may be that government, described by James Madison as "the greatest of all reflections on human nature," is also hopelessly and forever victim to it.

That notion receives even greater support from two other post-Watergate attempts at change: the 1974 federal campaign finance revisions and the Congressional Budget Act of the same year.

The campaign finance measure—officially the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974—also was enacted by a supercharged Congress in reaction to the secret campaign funds and outsized individual contributions of Nixon's 1972 reelection effort. The law established limits on donations to federal election campaigns, broad disclosure of the sources of contributions and public financing of presidential campaigns.

The statute did give the campaign process a new degree of transparency. But campaign financiers and their lawyers quickly learned how to get around the contribution limits by having the money directed to party organizations—rather than individual campaigns—for purposes not explicitly covered by the law. Individuals restricted

to donations of \$1,000 for each campaign under the federal law now are giving hundreds of thousands of dollars in "soft money" for the use of both parties.

Moreover, the 1974 law, by allowing corporations, unions and other organized forces to create separate campaign contribution funds, encouraged the growth of political action committees, PACs, generally formed by groups with particular interest in specific legislation, now pump tens of millions of dollars into congressional campaigns and are widely vilified—fairly or unfairly—as a cause of Congress's unresponsiveness to the needs of the nation.

The most battered "reform" of the Nixon-era backlash undoubtedly is the federal budget process set up in 1974. It was inspired by Nixon's refusal to spend billions of dollars appropriated by Congress (it was called "impoundment" and was his version of the line-item veto). Designed to reassert congressional control over federal spending, the bill ended impoundment and created the House and Senate Budget committees, the Congressional Budget Office and the process—still mysterious to much of America—by which Congress exercises its constitutional power of the purse.

Since then, various schemes to tame the creature have been attempted: the automatic sequestration of the 1985 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction law and the "ceilings" and "firewalls" of the 1990 congressional-executive budget agreement. In the process, much of the authority that Congress sought to reclaim with the 1974 measure has returned to the executive branch.

Meanwhile, the projected deficit this year is more than 65 times what it was in 1974.

—John E. Yang