

# Links to Hill Bolster Ford

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By Bob Kuttner

Washington Post Staff Writer

Max Friedersdorf is the White House staff man in charge of lining up votes in the House of Representatives, and while he tactfully denies that President Nixon's troubles made the job harder, Friedersdorf cheerfully admits his new boss is making things easier.

"This President is on a first-name basis with so many congressmen," said Friedersdorf. "He can take a member from some obscure district and know just what his problems are. Members are going to bend over backwards to vote with Jerry Ford."

"President Nixon seldom called the Hill personally," said Tom Korologos, the chief White House Senate lobbyist.

"President Ford is taking phone calls, calling guys on his own. And all of his advisers are old Hill people. They know the importance of a sewer grant or an honorary appointment. It's going to make some difference," Korologos said.

Indeed, the euphoria in the White House congressional liaison office suggests something of a paradox. Watergate may have discredited executive abuse of power, but the accession of a "congressional" President does not necessarily point to a new era of congressional ascendancy.

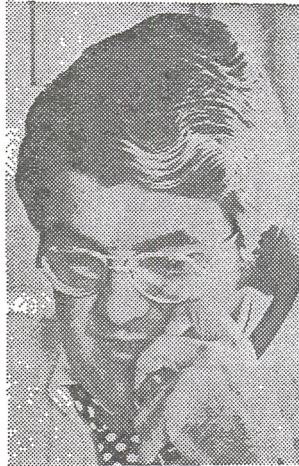
Congress did reassert during the "national nightmare" three of its most fundamental legislative prerogatives—to make war, devise the budget, and remove Presidents. But it will be years before it is clear whether a historic shift in the constitutional balance occurred.

As it struggled with Watergate, the Congress remained an unwieldy body, missing presidential direction. President Ford's first adroit legislative gestures last week to move the trade bill and the national health insurance proposal off dead center were accepted with obvious delight.

Although most congress-



REP. JOHN B. ANDERSON



TOM KOROLOGOS

... see better lines of communications with Ford

ground could make him a stronger, not weaker, chief executive.

"The fact that he comes out of Congress makes it easier for him to make Congress roll over," said a senior Democratic congressional staff man. "He's got more chips up here than Richard Nixon ever dreamed of."

Republican congressmen are also predicting a new unity with the White House.

"The lines of communication (to the Nixon White House) with Republicans who had criticized Watergate were simply down," said Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Republican Policy Conference. "That was their idea of how you play political hardball."

"All of that has changed," Anderson added. "Republicans generally will be more unified because they want to support Ford."

Last Tuesday, as House and Senate conferees were meeting to wrap up a relatively noncontroversial freedom of information bill, Republican members received word that President Ford might veto the measure unless changes were made, and the White House wanted a week to review it.

In fact, similar warnings, coming from the Justice Department, had been in the air for months. But the Republican conferees—all previously committed to the bill—immediately deferred to the new President's request, and the conference was put over.

Two weeks earlier, sponsors agreed, a veto threat

would have been almost meaningless.

On Thursday, the House voted 202 to 197 to keep \$6 billion in operating subsidies in a mass transit bill. At the urging of mayors and governors, President Ford agreed not to oppose operating subsidies, and the Public Works Committee provision survived thanks to the support of more than a score of Republicans.

Monday, the House will decide whether to cut the six-year transit program in half. President Ford wants the cut, from \$20 billion to \$11.6 billion, which has been billed as "the first test" of support for the President's budgetary views.

This week, Congress is also expected to approve overwhelmingly Mr. Ford's first legislative request—a cost of living monitoring agency, which many Democrats privately consider next to useless.

On other pending bills, protagonists are lined up, seeking the President's ear. House and Senate sponsors of the Senate-stalled consumer protection agency bill have contacted the White House to urge Mr. Ford to fashion a compromise. Senate backers of the oil cargo preference bill want the White House to overrule objections by the departments of Commerce and State and add the President's weight to a compromise bill.

Still to come are tests of the President's influence on several appropriations bills.

President Ford's first legislative initiatives came on issues ripe for compromise and starved for leadership.

Some of his early success may be simply the anticipated honeymoon.

But legislators are starting to see the "four C's" named in Mr. Ford's maiden speech to Congress—communication, conciliation, compromise and cooperation—as fully consistent with a strong presidency.

As the President himself said last Monday night, even as he praised "the people's house," to strong applause. "This cannot be a real homecoming. Under the Constitution, I now belong to the executive branch . . ."

"It could be a very long honeymoon", said one of the President's senior advisers. "Things become possible that were impossible six weeks ago."

"The only danger is that Congress thinks they have a special pull on him, and they get angry when they discover they don't," he continued. "Congressman X tries to call his congressional President, and the President doesn't have time to return his phone call."

men believe this President will be less remote, less imperial, and more willing to share power within the executive branch, the presidency seems to have lost none of its enormous residual authority. And Gerald R. Ford's legislative back-