

Caucus Set To Support Fund Cutoff

By Spencer Rich

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Senate Democrats unanimously proclaimed Vietnam as the dominant national issue yesterday, as the 93rd Congress convened at noon with Democrats in firm control of both chambers.

Caucusing two hours before Congress met, the senate Democrats, without dissent, endorsed a "little state-of-the-union message" by Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) which laid out a lengthy Democratic legislative program and declared:

"There is no greater national need than the termination, forthwith, of our involvement in the war in Vietnam."

It remains for the Congress to seek to bring about complete disinvolvement.

The Mansfield statement, in the interests of party unity, stopped short of spelling out any specific policy for forcing an end to the war should current negotiations fail. But, today the 57-member caucus is likely to adopt (though with some dissent) a resolution sponsored by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) declaring it to be Democratic policy to cut off funds for the Indochina conflict immediately, subject only to North Vietnamese release of U.S. prisoners. This is virtually identical to a statement approved by the House Democratic Caucus on Tuesday, 154 to 75.

Sens. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), John Stennis (D-Miss.), Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) and a few others said they will oppose the Kennedy language, but it appears to have the votes for caucus endorsement by better than 2-to-1.

Adoption of Kennedy's language or of similar proposals by George McGovern (D-S.D.) would put the Democrats in both chambers on collision course with President Nixon, who has repeatedly insisted that he be given a free hand to negotiate whatever conditions he deems desirable as part of a war settlement.

Caucus approval of end-the-war statements doesn't have any legal effect. It simply signals an intention to bring rap-

idly to the floor legislation that would block further Indochina war appropriations unless all U.S. combat operations are stopped.

One vehicle for this could be a new version of last year's Brooke-Cranston Amendment, now being circulated by Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.) It would cut off all Indochina combat funds two months after enactment, provided North Vietnam releases U.S. prisoners with that period.

Sponsors could obtain a floor vote by attaching this to an emergency foreign-aid money bill coming up in February, or by asking the Foreign Relations Committee to send the Brooke measure to the floor as a separate bill.

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Without opposition, the Senate Democratic Caucus re-elected Mansfield as Majority Leader, a post he has held since 1961, and Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) as whip.

The Senate GOP Caucus, meeting separately endorsed Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) and Minority Whip Robert P. Griffin (R-Mich.) for another two years in their leadership posts. Both ran unopposed.

In a contest, Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.) bested Sen. Robert Taft Jr. (R-Ohio) for chairmanship of the Senate GOP Policy Committee. 22 to 19. Tower replaces Gordon Allott (R-Colo.), who lost his bid for re-election to the Senate.

By an identical vote, first-term Sen. Bill Brock (R-Tenn.) defeated Brooke for the chair of the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

Sen. Norris Cotton (R-N.H.) was elected unopposed to head the Republican Caucus, replacing Margaret Chase Smith (Maine), who, was defeated for re-election.

Wallace F. Bennett (R-Utah) withdrew from a contest with Cotton for caucus chairman and was elected conference secretary, Cotton's former post.

In the Tower-Taft and Brock-Brooke races, both losers had the informal endorsement of the Wednesday Club, a group of about a dozen liberal GOP senators.

The 43-member GOP Caucus put off until Monday consideration of proposals to soften the seniority system for making committee assignments.

However, in a last-minute

vote after many Republicans had already left, the caucus adopted, 16 to 10, a resolution sponsored by Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) stating: "The Republican Senatorial Conference fully supports the efforts of the President to end the tragic conflict in Indochina now through a negotiated settlement."

Although this sounded like a routine endorsement, several administration loyalists voted against it. They said they feared that the word "now" implied that the President wasn't doing enough speedily enough to end the war, and that it could be taken as a threat to force the President's hand of the negotiations resuming next Monday.

"Can anyone doubt that the President would like to end it now?" asked Percy, who said the use of "now" was meant to emphasize the hope for serious and rapid peacemaking during the current series of negotiations.

At the Democratic caucus, a key change was made in the 17-member steering committee, headed by Mansfield, which makes committee assignments. Mansfield announced that the committee was being enlarged to 19. With two existing vacancies. This allowed the appointment of four new members Frank Church (D-Idaho), Joseph Biden (D-Del.), Russell Long (D-La.) and Dick Clark (D-Iowa).

The net effect is to give Northerners a clear majority on the Steering Committee over Southern and border state senators. This appears designed in part to let the Steering Committee beef up the Northern liberal representation on the Finance Committee, long dominated by business and conservative interests.

In turn, the Steering Committee, meeting late into the day, enlarged the Finance Committee to 17 members and tentatively named Walter Mondale (D-Minn.), Lloyd M. Bentsen (D-Tex.) and Mike Gravel (D-Alaska) to three Democratic vacancies. The committee also tentatively chose Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) over George McGovern for a Democratic vacancy on coveted foreign relations, and named Frank E. Moss (D-Utah) as chairman of the Space Committee.

Mansfield's "little state-of-the-union message" emphasized the war as the primary issue of the incoming Congress, but it also was filled with references to reassertion of Congress' powers in rela-

tion to the executive branch, particularly in combatting presidential domination on money matters and impoundment of appropriated funds.

The Majority Leader listed a large number of bills which Democrats hope to bring to the Senate floor rapidly, without waiting for legislative recommendations from the White House—an attempt to create an independent, progressive image.

They include vetoed measures such as airport development, water project authorization, mineral research centers, vocational rehabilitation funds, veterans' health care, public works and older Americans legislation. Housing, no-fault auto insurance, consumer protection and crime victims legislation, a minimum wage boost and pension reform also were listed.

Mansfield also said that "In view of the tendency of this war to flare unexpectedly, the leadership now questions the desirability of the Congress ever again to be in sine die adjournment as we have been since Oct. 18, 1972" — unable to reconvene at an instant to discuss matters such as the renewed full-scale bombing of North Vietnam.

Senator Jackson told reporters after yesterday's caucus that a Vietnam fund-cutoff move wouldn't be effective, since President Nixon can easily veto any bill containing such a cutoff, and there aren't nearly enough votes to override.

But Jackson said the President owes the nation a full explanation of "the massive bombing" of recent weeks which was a "departure" from past policies.

He said he favors having the caucus ask the President to address Congress with such an explanation—a proposal that Armed Services Committee Chairman Stennis appeared to agree with.

Peace negotiator Henry A. Kissinger is to brief House Republican freshmen on the war and other subjects Friday, but what Jackson wants is a full, formal account from the President himself.

Mr. Nixon has invited Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and Senate

to a breakfast meeting at the White House Friday to discuss domestic economic programs and the future of wage and price controls. White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said.

Asked if Vietnam would be discussed, Ziegler said the purpose of the meeting would be to discuss the economy. But he did not rule out the possibility of talking about Vietnam policy.

On Friday afternoon, the President will give a reception for all new members of the House and Senate.

The House, meanwhile, re-elected Carl Albert (D-Okla.) Speaker by a party-line vote of 236 to 188 over Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.).

Conference, Ford and all other members of the House elected unopposed. When the GOP Conference resumes Saturday morning (by Law, Congress has to meet at 1 p.m. Jan. 16 to count the presidential electoral votes), Rep. Paul

McCloskey (R-Calif.) plans to introduce a resolution opposing further Indochina bombing. He has little chance of success, however.

The House also adopted a resolution declaring vacant the seat of the missing former Majority Leader, Rep. Hale Boggs (D-La.) This opens the way for a special election in Louisiana.

The first partisan House fight developed over a Democratic move—which succeeded, 203 to 204—to give majority party leaders more flexibility in scheduling legislation.

In the future it will require not unanimous consent but only a majority vote to change the usual meeting time of the House from noon to an earlier hour on a day of heavy business. And four days each month instead of two will be available for taking up non-controversial bills by suspending the rules and passing them without amendment by a two-thirds vote.

Republicans opposed both changes.



This photo, transmitted by East Germany's news agency, is said to show Khanthien street in Hanoi following a bombing raid by U.S. B-52s on Dec. 27. The agency said

nearly all houses in this part of the North Vietnamese capital were destroyed in the raids which began Dec. 18. The agency said 28,000 lived in this section of Hanoi.

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