

# The Politics of a Congressional Pay Hike

The terror of facing angry voters in the 1974 election after voting themselves a fat pay boost seems certain to force the Democratic Congress to delay the congressional salary boost until early 1975 in opposition to President Nixon's support for it now.

No issue has produced so much cloak-room anguish as the 1974 pay increase. Controlling Senate Democrats, however, now see possible political gain at Mr. Nixon's expense by postponing the congressional part of the increase while letting admittedly overdue increases for federal judges and middle-to-top level federal employees take effect April 1.

The pay boost is politically explosive. Polls show voter approval of Congress as an institution at an all-time low of 20 per cent—lower than even the President's standing.

Hence, Democratic congressmen are terrified at the prospect of campaigning this fall after raising their own pay from the present \$42,500 to \$45,700 (which would increase in steps to \$52,800 by 1976).

Either house can kill the President's proposals by simple majority vote. By taking that course, Democrats can blame the President for the non-congressional raise while telling voters they refused to raise their own pay in 1974, despite 30 per cent inflation since the last increase.

That argument is reinforced by this little-known fact: of the President's

seven-member salary commission, the only two who opposed all raises (costing \$34 million the first two years) were Democrats: lawyers Edward H. Foley of Washington, D.C., and Joseph F. Meglen of Billings, Mont.

A House resolution to kill all raises is not expected to reach the floor by the March 9 deadline. But Sen. Gale McGee of Wyoming, chairman of the Senate Post Office Committee, will probably beat the Senate deadline with a resolution postponing the congressional raise. That is expected to pass, giving Democrats yet another issue for 1974.

A footnote: A politically sensitive provision that Democrats will let go into effect April 1, buried in the President's pay-increase proposals, would raise Mr. Nixon's own retirement pay from the present \$60,000 to \$64,500. That results from a Nixon administration first-term bill raising annual retirement pay of ex-Presidents from \$25,000 to the pay of a Cabinet member. The new pay raises will lift Cabinet members to \$64,500.

Aggravation over the way court-appointed experts have investigated the 18½-minute erasure is not limited to the White House but also includes the special prosecutor's office.

Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's lieutenants are privately confident the panel of experts ultimately will be upheld in rejecting White House claims

that the 18½-minute buzz on the June 20 tape was accidental. But the prosecutors are grumbling that the experts let themselves in for unnecessary criticism.

The prosecutors agree with one point in Nicholas Wade's article in the Feb. 22 Science magazine which criticizes the experts: the panel should not have submitted its Jan. 15 press release explaining the erasure without accompanying technical details.

That breach of scientific procedure was caused by pressure from Judge John Sirica to report quickly. But the experts may not have completed the technical report because they spent too much time on private business pursuits and not enough on their court-appointed task.

A footnote: The technician whose findings are reported in Science magazine—Allan D. Bell, president of Dektor Counterintelligence and Security, Inc.—is not Mr. Nixon's technical expert on the tapes. Just assigned that role is Dr. Michael Hecker, senior research engineer at Stanford (Calif.) Research Institute, who flew here Thursday to confer with Nixon lawyer James St. Clair.

Pennsylvania labor leaders, in hot water for endorsing liberal Republican Sen. Richard Schweiker's re-election, failed in a backstage attempt to get the AFL-CIO's national political operatives to bail them out.