

# Fish Tests Sentiment on Nixon in District

By TOM BUCKLEY

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CARMEL, N.Y., Aug. 4—Driving north from Washington last Friday, Representative Hamilton Fish Jr. was, in his words, uneasy.

He was returning to his rock-ribbed Republican district, centered on Dutchess and Putnam Counties, for the first time after casting, as a member of the House Judiciary Committee, two votes in favor of the impeachment of President Nixon.

His wife, Billy, drove for the first three hours while he went over the copy for a newsletter for his district, an impeachment special. The back of the station wagon was crammed with furniture they were taking from their home in the capital to their home in Millbrook, along with their cairn terrier and two cats.

"We were just filled with apprehension," Mrs. Fish said. "We had not idea what to expect. We were edgy and tired and I don't think we said much to each other."

## Aided by His Father

At first glance, it might have seemed that Mr. Fish was invulnerable. In 1972, the district, which also includes parts of Westchester, Ulster and Columbia Counties, returned him for a third term with 144,386 votes to 54,271 for his Democratic rival. He ran 4,000 votes ahead of the Nixon landslide.

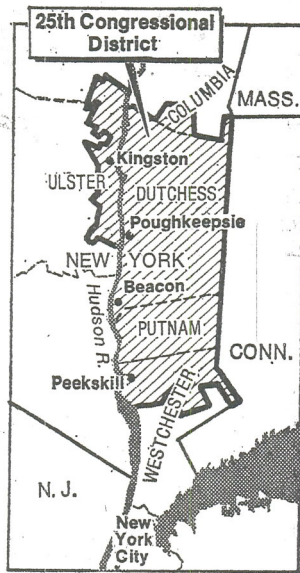
Looming larger in his thinking, though, was the fact that party loyalties run deep among the farmers and small-townners of the district. Moreover, he had been enormously assisted among these constituents by his father, who represented virtually the same district from 1920 to 1945 and was, for most of that time, the unyielding opponent of his most eminent constituent, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In fact, Mr. Fish represented the fourth consecutive generation of his family, all bearing the same name, to sit in Congress. His great-grandfather, who served as Secretary of State in the Grant Administration, was first elected as a Whig in 1842. He became a Republican in 1856 at the time of the party's first national convention.

## Struggle Within Family

Representative Fish found himself caught in a family struggle. His father, a hale 85 years old, had made it clear that he thought his son should side with the President. His wife and the younger generation strongly favored the course that he followed.

"I spoke to my father on the telephone three or four weeks ago," he said, "and he



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sent me a couple of letters, discussing the politics of the situation. The most difficult thing for me was to get into the frame of mind in which I could vote for impeachment. That happened very gradually."

On Saturday Mr. Fish made his first public appearance in the district. Accompanied by his wife and John Naccarato, who runs his office in Kingston, he drove down to the benefit auction sponsored by St. James Episcopal Church in North Salem, in the northeastern corner of Westchester County.

## Performance Is Praised

The Representative, tall, dark-haired, wearing an old shirt, baggy slacks and stained tennis shoes, circulated on the edge of the crowd of a couple of hundred people while the auctioneer, following time-honored rural practice, stuck summer visitors with an extraordinary variety of worn and unusable objects.

A tanned, baldish man strode over and stuck out his hand. "That was a fine TV appearance," he said. "You had to make a judgment and you did it. I can't say that I liked that solid phalanx of Democratic votes, though."

Mr. Fish looked relieved. This is Donald Mossman," he observed to a bystander. "He's an active Republican here in North Salem."

"Congratulations on a magnificent performance," said another man, seizing Mr. Fish's hand. He introduced himself as David Rowan, publisher of Ski Area Management magazine who is a member of the town's Republican advisory committee.

Asked if he thought he was reflecting the views of other commuting executives, Mr. Rowan replied, "I think so. Based on cocktail party conversation, anyhow. I haven't

heard a dissenting opinion about the Congressman's vote—not a single one."

After Mr. Rowan walked away, Mr. Fish said, "That's encouraging. I was particularly worried about what the reaction was going to be because I've only represented this area for a year and a half. They don't know me here as well as they do in Dutchess and Putnam."

The Representative walked around to the front of the church, a century-old white painted wooden example of Victorian gothic architecture.

There he encountered the day's only strongly dissenting opinion. It was advanced by Mrs. Beatrice Armstrong of Grants Corners, a nearby hamlet, who is the organist at the church.

Looking angry, her jaw set, she said, "It was just a political thing. Don't you feel you did damage to the Republican party by your vote?"

"Loyalty to the Constitution comes first," he replied.

"Don't you think it will be a very dangerous thing for the country if the President is impeached?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," Mr. Fish said. "The important thing is to follow the constitutional process."

## An Unconvinced Voter

After the Representative ambled away, Mrs. Armstrong looked ruffled. "He didn't sway me one little bit," she said. "I voted for him and for his father, but I won't vote for him again."

What may have bothered Mr. Fish more, however, was the fact that so many in the throng ignored him—some, no doubt, because they were unaware of his presence, which was not heralded by loudspeakers, but others because they wished to register their disapproval in that way.

The next day, Sunday, the temperature was even cooler when Mr. and Mrs. Fish attended the annual picnic of the Carmel-Mahopac Republican Club at Putnam County Park here.

Selling tickets were Mrs. Ruth Whittmer and Robert Gast. "I'd vote for Agnew if he ran," said Mrs. Whittmer, "that's the kind of Republican I am, but I disagree with Fish so much I'm not going to vote for him, and my husband feels the same way I do."

Mr. Gast was asked if he subscribed to her views. "You better believe it?" he exclaimed.

The other politicians at the picnic—county clerks, councilmen, judges, an Assemblyman and a State Senator—all narrowly avoided slipped disks ducking the question whether they agreed with Mr. Fish's votes in favor of

Articles I and II in the articles of impeachment.

"He had the information," one of them said, summing up the position. "We didn't it."

A justice of the peace added a jocular note, "I can't comment," he said. "The case might come before me."

Someone mentioned G. Gordon Liddy, who is serving a long prison sentence after being convicted as one of the masterminds of the original Watergate break-in.

Mr. Fish shook his head. "You know I recommended him for his job in the Treasury Department in 1969," he said. "He ran against me in the Republican primary in 1968. He lost, but he was already on the ballot on the Conservative line. He agreed not to campaign and he became the Dutchess County coordinator for the Committee to Re-elect the President."

"When he got a post in the Treasury Department I thought he would be fine," Mr. Fish went on. "He had been an F.B.I. man and Assistant District Attorney up here, and he was going to be involved with drugs and law enforcement. It looked like he had all the right qualifications."

## Loss of Votes Foreseen

Mr. Fish's father sadly discussed the defection of his son, and the other Judiciary Committee Republicans who voted for impeachment, in a telephone conversation on Sunday from his summer home in Toms River, N.J.

"I'm certain that six out of the seven will be beaten in November," he said. "The only one who won't is my son. At that, his stand will cost him 50,000 votes."

Nevertheless, he said, he would continue to support his son. "As a matter of principle I shouldn't," he went on. "I know that. But blood is thicker than water."

## 4 Generations in House

"There's no other family in America that has had four consecutive generations in the House of Representatives," he said, his mood brightening. "Not the Cabots or Lodges, or anyone. I've got my candidate for 1990. He's Hamilton Fish 3d, my grandson, who just graduated from Harvard. He's a wonderful young fellow."

Even Monday's disclosures did not sharply change the view of the situation taken by the senior Mr. Fish, who had written his son urging support for Mr. Nixon.

"There still has been no impeachable offense proven," he declared, "but politically it may seal his case and maybe he should resign."

In Washington, his son said, "I don't think there's anything I have to add to what I've already said."



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**Representative Hamilton Fish Jr., center, facing camera, in his first public appearance in home area since he voted for impeachment. It was a church benefit at North Salem, N.Y. Most who spoke to him supported his stand.**