

Domestic Record -- Setbacks

8-9-74
S.F. Chou

Washington

President Nixon set out to reverse the tide of domestic programs, to divert the flow of power away from Washington and back to the states and localities.

He was only partly successful.

Mr. Nixon's avowed aim was to create what he referred to frequently as a "new federalism." But with his overriding interest in foreign affairs and with the Democrats solidly in control of a sometimes balky Congress, only a few of his domestic reforms were enacted into law.

Mr. Nixon spelled out his first domestic program in a nationally televised speech Aug. 8, 1969. "After a third of a century of power flowing from the people and the states to Washington it is time for a new federalism in which power, funds and responsibility will flow from Washington to the states and to the people," he said.

In that speech, Mr. Nixon proposed four major programs for congressional action — a reform of the welfare system under which a minimum federal assistance of \$1600 a year for a family of four would be paid; creation of a manpower training program to pull together various job training operations but with a decentralized administration; a reorganization of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and a new program to share federal tax revenues with the states and localities.

The welfare reform proposal was passed by the House, but it died in late 1972 when the Senate and the administration failed to reach agreement on a compromise.

When reorganization of the manpower programs and the Office of Economic Opportunity also encountered congressional opposition, Mr. Nixon proposed phasing out OEO programs, but a federal district judge ruled earlier this year that the agency could not be shut down without congressional approval.

Revenue sharing fared slightly better. With the support of many of the nation's governors and mayors, Congress approved a five-year, \$30 billion commitment of federal funds that would be passed on to the states and localities with few strings on how the money is to be spent.

However, the second part of the revenue sharing package — the gathering of existing federal grants that go to a variety of education, housing and job training programs into so-called "special" revenue sharing programs — has languished, with Congress generally reluctant to yield control over the spending of the funds and the administration not vigorously pursuing the proposed change.

After taking office for a second term in January, 1973 for example, Mr. Nixon sent a series of written messages to Congress but did not go to the Capitol to deliver the traditional State of the Union message.

And in some cases when Mr. Nixon failed to secure congressional action on some of his proposals he sought to do the same thing by executive action, such as his attempt to phase out the anti-poverty program.

Last January, for instance, after Congress had failed to enact his reorganization plan to consolidate seven cabinet departments into four, Mr. Nixon announced a reshuffling of cabinet and White House staff duties to accomplish the same result.

Also, Mr. Nixon began vetoing bills and impounding — or declining to spend — funds for various existing programs appropriated by Congress, such as for a variety of health, highway and housing programs.

The impoundments triggered a number of lawsuits challenging the President's power to withhold funds appropriated by Congress and a congressional effort to pass legislation curbing the President's impoundment powers.

In sum, the five years of the Nixon presidency were marked by some successes as well as failures.

Enacted were such things as major air and water pollution control laws, plus the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. The post office department was converted into a government corporation. The long-standing program of price supports for agricultural products was overhauled, and a \$20 billion highway bill that will eventually open up the highway trust fund to urban mass transit needs was approved.

New York Times