

Hungate to Retire; Cites Camelot End, Watergate Arrival

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REP. WILLIAM L. HUNGATE
... lost passion for job

Rep. William L. Hungate (D-Mo.), whose droll humor brought some relief to the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment deliberations last summer, announced yesterday he will retire at the end of next year because he has lost his "passion" for the job of congressman.

"Politics has gone from the age of 'Camelot' where all things were possible to the age of 'Watergate' when all things are suspect," Hungate said.

Last year, as the House Judiciary Committee considered charges against then President Nixon on national television, Hungate voiced impatience at the refusal of some Republicans to accept what he considered obvious facts.

If an elephant walked into the committee room, he said then, some members might insist that it could be a "mouse with a glandular condition."

Hungate presided last fall over what is believed to be the only presidential testimony before a congressional committee, when President Ford explained his pardon of Nixon for any crimes he may have committed as President.

Hungate is considered a hardworking, competent congressman. Recently he guided through the House a bill making changes in the federal rules of criminal procedure.

But, age 52 and a House member for 13 years, Hungate said yesterday his "enthusiasm for public service has been waning" because of frustrations, pressures and demands of the job.

"The years erode tolerance, stamina and patience," said Hungate in announcing his plans to retire at the end of the 94th Congress and return to the practice of law.

"Where once criticism fell without impact, it now lands heavily. Since I entered office, the duties have increased dramatically, exceeded only by public dissatisfaction with Congress. Politics has gone from the age of 'Camelot' where all things were possible to the age of 'Watergate' when all things are suspect."

Hungate said he came to Washington intending to stay only one term "to straighten things out," but found it would take longer. After six years he became a subcommittee chairman but felt "invisible restraints" and decided that even if he stayed 10 more years or longer and became chairman of the Judiciary Committee he couldn't achieve all the things he wanted.

He likened the public life to a hammock—hard to get into and hard to get out of. But he said he thought it time to step aside and give others a chance for service. Dismissing suggestions that he run for governor of Missouri,

he said he is leaving public life.

White-haired with a youthful face, Hungate comes from Mark Twain country along the Mississippi and has a collection of Twain-like stories for any occasion. He succeeded the late Clarence Cannon, crusty old longtime chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, who looked like Grumpy of Walt Disney's Seven Dwarfs and talked like Donald Duck. Hungate can mimic Cannon perfectly.

A graduate of Harvard Law School and a former Missouri prosecutor, Hungate said he entered public life in part because of an experience in World War II. Five of the 12 men in his rifle squad were killed, five were wounded—and Hungate was transferred to headquarters because he played saxophone and the colonel wanted a band. Hungate said he could find no rational reason for that experience and "felt a responsibility to serve my country in some way that might at least partially repay their sacrifices."