

**The original documents are located in Box 5, folder “Congress” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

### **Copyright Notice**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Ron Nessen donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

## THE CONGRESS

By Walter Taylor

Washington Star Staff Writer

Beginning with his campaign last year against the imaginary "veto-proof" Congress, President Ford has had the predominantly Democratic House off-stride and on the defensive.

With a small hardcore of Republicans and Southern Democrats eager to be his ally on any issue that could

### Two Main Congressmen angry over White House pressure. Page A-7.

be said to involve "excessive" federal spending, Ford has built a remarkable record of success.

The strategy has been a simple one: The President takes a hard-line stance in opposition to a favorite Democratic proposal, backs it up with a veto or a veto threat and the Democratic leadership, unable despite their two-thirds majority in the House to override, caves in.

WHILE ALL THIS was going on, the Democrats were in disarray, spending much of their time fighting among themselves and trying to explain to one another that the losses really weren't their own fault, that a goodly chunk of their fat House majority comprised Southern conservatives more closely aligned philosophically with Ford than with their Democratic colleagues.

The President worked his magic formula successfully on the big Democratic jobs and housing bills, on strip mine legislation and, most recently, on the issue of aid to New York City. In the end, the "compromise" agreements reached on those measures were much closer to the positions of Ford and his minority following than to those of the Democratic majority.

Judging from the first angry reaction of liberal and moderate Democrats to his success yesterday in upholding the veto of a \$16.8 billion tax cut bill, the President and his loyalists may have gone with the same game plan once too often.

—ON FIRST BLUSH, it appears that Ford and House conservatives have won the most important congressional fight of the year. The President said he would veto any tax cut measure that was not accompanied by a spending ceiling for the coming fiscal year. The Democrats refused to attach the spending limit and vowed to override the veto.

He did; they couldn't.

But the question is, what did Ford win?

First, if the Democrats hold firm in their refusal to buy a post-veto "compromise" on White House terms — and severe pressure already is mounting on their leadership not to bargain — the President is not going to get his spending ceiling.

"WE'RE NOT GOING for any spending ceiling until we see the President's budget, so let's forget about that," Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill snapped last night when GOP Leader John Rhodes suggested that some accommodation still was possible.

Second, and most important politically, yesterday's exercise of White House muscle means that withholding rates for 70 million taxpayers appear likely to increase in January.

The question of who would be held accountable in the event an impasse on the spending ceiling question led to such an increase has not been far removed in the long weeks of debate on the tax measure. But after some initial fretting, Democrats now are making noises indicating that they are prepared to gamble that it will be Ford and the Republicans who will be fingered by the voters.

Speaking last night of possible compromise, Rep. Wayne L. Hays of Ohio, one of the best no-holds-barred combatants on the Democratic side, put it this way: "He wants us to take him off the hook. . . . We didn't put him there."

### THE ANNOUNCED

plans by Democratic leaders is to march out of town for Christmas today without further action on the tax bill unless Ford abandons or severely waters down his demands for a spending limitation.

There are some Democrats who believe that Ford did not want to win the veto fight at all, that he wanted a new fiscal issue with

which to charm the Republican right without the political risks inherent in a tax increase. This theory figures former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, already ahead of Ford in Republican polls, into the mix.

But if the theory is valid, Ford underestimated the ability of Rhodes and other Republican leaders in the House to rally the troops behind the position taken publicly by the administration. Rhodes has said time and again that his one-third minority in the House is the most cohesive group in Congress, and for once that fact may turn out to be a political liability for the Republicans.

Of the 144 House Republicans, all but 19 went down the lane with Ford. They were joined by 32 Southern or border state Democrats in mustering the edge needed to sustain Ford's veto.

SINCE BOTH Ford and his followers in Congress have stressed that they too want extension and expansion of last year's tax cuts, just as the Democrats do, it appears obvious that they were counting heavily on a post-veto cave-in by O'Neill, Speaker Carl Albert and other House leaders.

Ford won similar gambles in the big veto fights earlier this year. But in those cases, the stakes were not so high, the agony of political defeat not likely to be so quickly felt. If withholding rates go up, they go up in next month; if the increase triggers a further slowdown in the economy, as the Democrats suggest it could, that too could be felt very quickly.

The political dynamics affecting House Democrats also are different now than they were earlier this year. Ways and Means Committee Chairman Al Ullman, D-Ore., has been bloodied by House conservatives, including those on his own committee, on several occasions already in his first year as Wilbur Mills' successor.

Like a man who see himself betrayed once too often, Ullman is among those taking the hardest line against an 11th hour agreement on White House terms. He is joined by Rep. Brock Adams, D-Wash., and others deeply involved in the congressional budget process, who see the new system threatened by Ford's demands.

ALBERT AND O'NEILL also are under the gun in the tax dispute. The Speaker particularly was roasted by frustrated Democratic freshmen after Ford's earlier veto victories, and he is desperately trying to keep his hold on the leadership reins.

There was little early criticism by Democrats of Albert and O'Neill for their inability to muster the votes to override the tax veto, despite indications that they may have been a bit overconfident in assumptions that they would pick up substantial Republican support for the effort.

Rather, party firebrands were eying the leadership's post-veto strategy carefully.

A rumor that Ford's spending ceiling had been accepted after yesterday's vote, for example, sent freshman Democrats scrambling to a closed-door caucus. O'Neill was given a cheer when he told the new members that the strategy was, in effect, to let Ford stew in his own juice.

REP. NORMAN MINETA, D-Calif outgoing president of the group, said

it was made clear to O'Neill that the freshmen wanted no quickie settlement that would make Democrats look like patsies.

"Never" is a word carefully avoided in Washington politics, and the current hang-tough attitude by House Democrats could evaporate as quickly as congressmen on a Friday afternoon.

But if it does not, rather than spawn even greater Democratic disarray the President's latest "victory" could bring his opponents in the House closer together than they've been all year.

## THE CONGRESS

By Walter Taylor  
Washington Star Staff Writer

Beginning with his campaign last year against the imaginary "veto-proof" Congress, President Ford has had the predominantly Democratic House off-stride and on the defensive.

With a small hardcore of Republicans and Southern Democrats eager to be his ally on any issue that could

### Two Main Congressmen angry over White House pressure. Page A-7.

be said to involve "excessive" federal spending, Ford has built a remarkable record of success.

The strategy has been a simple one: The President takes a hard-line stance in opposition to a favorite Democratic proposal, backs it up with a veto or a veto threat and the Democratic leadership, unable despite their two-thirds majority in the House to override, caves in.

WHILE ALL THIS was going on, the Democrats were in disarray, spending much of their time fighting among themselves and trying to explain to one another that the losses really weren't their own fault, that a goodly chunk of their fat House majority comprised Southern conservatives more closely aligned philosophically with Ford than with their Democratic colleagues.

The President worked his magic formula successfully on the big Democratic jobs and housing bills, on strip mine legislation and, most recently, on the issue of aid to New York City. In the end, the "compromise" agreements reached on those measures were much closer to the positions of Ford and his minority following than to those of the Democratic majority.

Judging from the first angry reaction of liberal and moderate Democrats to his success yesterday in upholding the veto of a \$16.8 billion tax cut bill, the President and his loyalists may have gone with the same game plan once too often.

—ON FIRST BLUSH, it appears that Ford and House conservatives have won the most important congressional fight of the year. The President said he would veto any tax cut measure that was not accompanied by a spending ceiling for the coming fiscal year. The Democrats refused to attach the spending limit and vowed to override the veto.

He did; they couldn't.

But the question is, what did Ford win?

First, if the Democrats hold firm in their refusal to buy a post-veto "compromise" on White House terms — and severe pressure already is mounting on their leadership not to bargain — the President is not going to get his spending ceiling.

"WE'RE NOT GOING for any spending ceiling until we see the President's budget, so let's forget about that," Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill snapped last night when GOP Leader John Rhodes suggested that some accommodation still was possible.

Second, and most important politically, yesterday's exercise of White House muscle means that withholding rates for 70 million taxpayers appear likely to increase in January.

The question of who would be held accountable in the event an impasse on the spending ceiling question led to such an increase has not been far removed in the long weeks of debate on the tax measure. But after some initial fretting, Democrats now are making noises indicating that they are prepared to gamble that it will be Ford and the Republicans who will be

Speaking last night of possible compromise, Rep. Wayne L. Hays of Ohio, one of the best no-holds-barred combatants on the Democratic side, put it this way: "He wants us to take him off the hook. . . . We didn't put him there."

THE ANNOUNCED plans by Democratic leaders is to march out of town for Christmas today without further action on the tax bill unless Ford abandons or severely waters down his demands for a spending limitation.

There are some Democrats who believe that Ford did not want to win the veto fight at all, that he wanted a new fiscal issue with

which to charm the Republican right without the political risks inherent in a tax increase. This theory figures former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, already ahead of Ford in Republican polls, into the mix.

But if the theory is valid, Ford underestimated the ability of Rhodes and other Republican leaders in the House to rally the troops behind the position taken publicly by the administration. Rhodes has said time and again that his one-third minority in the House is the most cohesive group in Congress, and for once that fact may turn out to be a political liability for the Republicans.

Of the 144 House Republicans, all but 19 went down the lane with Ford. They were joined by 32 Southern or border state Democrats in mustering the edge needed to sustain Ford's veto.

SINCE BOTH Ford and his followers in Congress have stressed that they too want extension and expansion of last year's tax cuts, just as the Democrats do, it appears obvious that they were counting heavily on a post-veto cave-in by O'Neill, Speaker Carl Albert and other House leaders.

Ford won similar gambles in the big veto fights earlier this year. But in those cases, the stakes were not so high, the agony of political defeat not likely to be so quickly felt. If withholding rates go up, they go up in next month; if the increase triggers a further slowdown in the economy, as the Democrats suggest it could, that too could be felt very quickly.

The political dynamics affecting House Democrats also are different now than they were earlier this year. Ways and Means Committee Chairman Al Ullman, D-Ore., has been bloodied by House conservatives, including those on his own committee, on several occasions already in his first year as Wilbur Mills' successor.

Like a man who see himself betrayed once too often, Ullman is among those taking the hardest line against an 11th hour agreement on White House terms. He is joined by Rep. Brock Adams, D-Wash., and others deeply involved in the congressional budget process, who see the new system threatened by Ford's demands.

ALBERT AND O'NEILL also are under the gun in the tax dispute. The Speaker particularly was roasted by frustrated Democratic freshmen after Ford's earlier veto victories, and he is desperately trying to keep his hold on the leadership reins.

There was little early criticism by Democrats of Albert and O'Neill for their inability to muster the votes to override the tax veto, despite indications that they may have been a bit overconfident in assumptions that they would pick up substantial Republican support for the effort

Rather, party firebrands were eying the leadership's post-veto strategy carefully.

A rumor that Ford's spending ceiling had been accepted after yesterday's vote, for example, sent freshman Democrats scrambling to a closed-door caucus. O'Neill was given a cheer when he told the new members that the strategy was, in effect, to let Ford stew in his own juice.

REP. NORMAN MINETA, D-Calif outgoing president of the group, said

it was made clear to O'Neill that the freshmen wanted no quickie settlement that would make Democrats look like patsies.

"Never" is a word carefully avoided in Washington politics, and the current hang-tough attitude by House Democrats could evaporate as quickly as congressmen on a Friday afternoon.

But if it does not, rather than spawn even greater Democratic disarray the President's latest "victory" could bring his opponents in the House closer together than they've been all year.