FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

RELEASE: JULY 28, 1981

CONSERVATIVE COALITION IN CONGRESS

The new Republican-conservative-Democratic coalition in the U.S. House may have produced something more far-reaching than Gramm-Latta I and II. It may produce a whole new political realignment that could give us conservative government regardless of whether or not Republicans win a House majority in 1982.

The aim, of course, is to tip over Tip O'Neill from his powerful position as Speaker of the House. O'Neill is a skillful and ruthless politician who has used his power in such vital ways as forcing a 2-to-1 Democratic majority on the two most important House committees: Rules and Ways & Means.

After the November 1980 election, Congressman Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) had the vision that a conservative House coalition could be built then, and he spelled out the tactics. He startled a lot of politicians when he frankly said, "As a Republican Congressman from Georgia, I am willing to vote for a conservative Democrat for Speaker."

Unfortunately, his conservative colleagues were too faint of heart to venture out on a new and uncertain battlefield. A combination of partisan prejudices and political inertia combined to prevent O'Neill from being toppled in the 1981 House organization.

Although Congressman Gingrich did not succeed in defeating Tip O'Neill, he did rack up several important achievements. First, Gingrich showed the world that the House is controlled by an ultra liberal who for years has given the liberals everything they could possibly want.

This was important to prove, because many people were under the impression that conservatives won everywhere last November. Now conservatives don't have to take the blame for the shenanigans and obstructionism of O'Neill and the other liberals.

Secondly, O'Neill had to make a number of concessions to conservative Democrats in terms of committee assignments and rules. Thirdly and most important, O'Neill had to use strongarm tactics on Democratic Congressmen which they much resented.

(more)

Congressman Gingrich also achieved an openness toward the new idea of a coalition among conservative Democratic and Republican Congressmen. He gave national stature to the idea of a conservative-coalition majority government which had already been adopted by several state legislatures.

Now enter Stage Right a politician who supports conservative-coalition politics and who also is more powerful and more persuasive than Tip O'Neill, namely, Ronald Reagan. In order to pilot his economic program through Congress, President Reagan unabashedly adopted what he calls his "new coalition" in Congress. He asked Democratic Congressmen to support his economic package, and he pledged not to campaign against them if they did.

On the first budget vote, Reagan got 63 conservative Democrats to defect from Tip O'Neill's leadership. Later, on critical procedural votes, 29 conservative Democrats backed the President instead of O'Neill.

Speaker O'Neill wasn't just sulking in his office while these major defections were taking place. He threatened to punish conservative Democrats for getting out of line. In so doing, he played right into coalition hands because those old-fashioned threats just don't work any more.

The Democrats hold a 51-vote majority in the House. For the Republicans to organize the House after the 1982 election and elect their own Speaker without Democratic help, the GOP would have to take 26 seats away from Democrats. While not impossible, few forecasters are predicting that will happen.

Since the dramatic victories of the winning coalition that President Reagan forged for his economic program, coalition backers have grown so optimistic that they are no longer modestly asking conservative Republican Congressmen to vote for a conservative Democratic Speaker. Instead, they are confidently asking conservative Democrats to vote for a conservative Republican Speaker.

Is there a coalition-conservative government in our nation's future? No one knows for sure. But the combination of President Reagan's charisma, compelling economic issues, Newt Gingrich's strategy, and Tip O'Neill's mistakes could bring it about in January 1983 regardless of whether Republicans or Democrats hold a majority of seats.

(end)