

A LOOK AHEAD BY THE REPUBLICANS

Interview With Senator Dirksen



Is this to be a comeback year for Republicans in Congress, and at the polls?

What will be the decisive issues in the new session: Vietnam, "Great Society," spending?

For answers, members of the staff of "U. S. News & World Report" interviewed the Senate's Minority Leader, Everett M. Dirksen, of Illinois.

Q Senator Dirksen, do you feel that there is a good chance the Republicans can make a comeback in the 1966 elections?

A Frankly, I believe there is. Let me tell you why: Parties do not defeat each other. Generally speaking, parties defeat themselves. A party becomes the victim of its mistakes and of its blunders because these are communicated to the public quickly through newspapers and news magazines. There are TV reports and radio reports every hour of the hour. What's more, this is a literate country. People are in a position to read, to understand and to judge.

Q Are you saying that the Democratic Party is about to become a victim of its own undertakings?

A Well, as I travel around the country, I have been astounded by a number of things. The way in which the so-called anti-poverty war has not caught on is one example.

Take Peoria County, which lies about in the center of Illinois. The board of supervisors had a meeting to determine whether to accept a poverty grant. Some people were arguing: "Look, here is money out of the Federal Treasury. Why shouldn't we take some if it is there?" But the vote was 2 to 1 against so doing.

These people just didn't believe that there was a sufficient need to reach into the Federal Treasury and take a handful of money that could not be carefully and properly expended.

Q Do you find this attitude widespread?

A We've been making a survey of other counties in Illinois. I have no doubt that there is need in some counties. On the other hand, the poverty people went down to Livingston County—completely agricultural—and all they could find for the youngsters to do was to go along Main Street and pick grass out of the cracks in the sidewalks.

They have a library in which the librarian works a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the afternoon. For that, she received \$75 a month. But the sponsors of the anti-poverty program decided to assign three Job Corps girls to the library. The little girls received more money than the woman who was a trained librarian.

Things like that become the talk of the town and of the

"The question is: Can you finance what is going on in Vietnam and at the same time carry on domestic programs?"

... "Cost of living is the highest in the country's history"

county. And what do people say? They say: "Look what's happening to our tax dollars."

Q In this new session of Congress, are Republicans going to try to sidetrack some of the "Great Society" programs?

A We'll try to cut out all the fat we can and deposit on the sidelines the things that are not necessary to the economy or that may be of doubtful value to the country.

I have looked at many of these anti-poverty-program reports. There was the one that caused me to do that little ballet piosette on the floor of the Senate. Imagine the idea of taking 457 teen-age girls between the ages of 13 and 15 out to look at a variety of occupations from "truck driving to choreography!"

That wasn't my language. It was from the official release put out by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Now I'm having trouble getting those releases. But I've asked for a copy of every release they made, particularly on Camp Breckenridge, in Kentucky. It is under the supervision of Southern Illinois University. That gives me a special interest.

The university got a 9-million-dollar grant. I discovered now that of the 636 enrollees in a camp meant for 2,000 there already have been 200 dropouts. That's a lot higher dropout rate than we have in public schools. I am advised that 21 of the camp's staff have either quit or been dismissed. There was even talk that 50 wives of staff members were on the payroll. I haven't been able to verify that latter item, but I've asked for the information and I'm going to get it.

FLAWS IN "GREAT SOCIETY"—

Q What, in your opinion, is the trouble in "Great Society" programs?

A Lack of planning. You shouldn't undertake these kinds of programs without ample time for the most careful analysis.

If I need an example, I'll go back to the old WPA [the New Deal's Works Progress Administration]. Everybody was delighted when they said: "We'll build some runways at the airport in Joliet, Ill."

Now, Joliet is 25 miles from Chicago. There were many times when the Chicago airport was fogged in, but you could get into Joliet in a DC-3.

What happened? I remember landing on those runways on some occasions. Pieces of concrete flaked off—just flew in all directions—and pitted the planes' propellers. Finally, all the work had to be redone. How do you justify that sort of thing?

In my home town, they put in a sewer. But when they got to the place where they had to go under switch trucks in the industrial area to get to the Illinois River, they hadn't gotten any clearance. There was a sewer, but no outlet.

Q Do you detect a new attitude among Congressmen, with elections coming up this year?

A Well, even the Democrats are saying that it's time to sit back and take stock of what's been done. I think back to a newspaper interview of Senator Mansfield (Mitt Mansfield, of Montana, Senate Majority Leader). He stated that so much of the legislation in the first session of the 89th Congress had been so hastily done that it was in need of refinement—that we would have to knock off the rough corners, plug the loopholes, assess our capacity to meet the cost, and it was going to take considerable time.

Look at the rather peculiar situation that has arisen in Illinois. Our welfare people went on the theory that when you had a 87 increase in the Social Security check, that you deduct that amount from the welfare that comes out of the State pocket. Of course, there was resistance right away.

People became extremely vocal about it. It's one of those little things that's going to be ventilated in connection with Social Security.

Then there's Medicare. It hasn't gotten under way sufficiently at the moment to make a judgment. But the tax is starting on a new base—\$8,600 rather than \$4,800. Consider for a moment companies like Caterpillar, Cleveland Twist Drill, International Harvester, the automobile makers, and others with many people making \$6,000 or more. There it goes to be a substantially bigger deduction from their paychecks. It will amount to over \$100 more than it has been in a year.

And the cost of living is going up. It is the highest in the history of the country. Don't think people are not talking about the high cost of living today. They go out and look at pork chops at \$1, \$1.05 a pound, and other staples where prices have risen sharply.

Q But doesn't that stem from high hog prices which are helping farmers?

A I know, but think of the consumer, particularly in the big metropolitan areas. And, over all, farmers are not too happy about what they're getting because their prices are still well under parity.

I just have to let these programs speak for themselves and for their impact on the producer and the consumer. It's the old story. When you begin to tamper too much with the economy of a complicated country and you start letting decisions be made in Washington, D.C., instead of in the marketplace, almost invariably you are going to develop imbalances and trouble.

Q Do you feel that is happening now?

A I think so. Business—large and small—has always complained that, when Government intrudes too deeply, the free-enterprise system is impeded.

Suppose I'm in the steel-fabricating business. I call a steel plant. "What's the price on channels and on bars and on rods?" The fellow at the other end of the line gives me a price. I say: "Put me down for 10 tons of channels and 10 tons of rods and 20 tons of bars." That's a decision that's made in the marketplace. Millions of such decisions are made in the marketplace every day.

But suppose Government comes along and says: "Wait a minute. You can't charge that much for channels." Right away troubles begin.

PROBLEMS WITH PRICES—

Q Will Republicans make an issue of President Johnson's efforts to hold prices to so-called guidelines?

A The question is: Where is the end of that road? We've had steel—twice—which caused quite a flurry. Then came aluminum, and then came copper. Then wheat. You should hear farmers complaining about the Administration's announcement that it would dump surplus wheat on the market.

Q Do you see signs that these "intrusions into the marketplace," as you call them, are impairing President Johnson's support from businessmen?

A I do not pass on that particular end of it because most of the developments are relatively recent, but I've heard a lot of discussion of other aspects of Administration policy.

After Congress adjourned last autumn, I took exactly four days' vacation. Then I went to work on tour—Idaho and Kansas, Pennsylvania and New York, Illinois and Alabama and Texas, wherever the schedule took me. I talked with all sorts of people—business people, waiters, cab drivers, everybody

... Vietnam: "Let's get the war over and done with"

who would talk to me—just to get their reaction. Some of it was pretty sharp.

The reaction, for instance, on our fight against the repeal of the "right to work" law was absolutely overwhelming in every section of the country where I visited with people.

There was an equal reaction with respect to our fight on the Supreme Court decision on reapportioning of our State legislatures.

And, of course, there's very strong and rising interest in Vietnam. That's a matter of deep concern to people everywhere.

HOW VOTERS REACT TO WAR—

Q What were some of the things people are saying about Vietnam?

A I think, generally, they want this thing to proceed, and with vigor, to bring it to a successful and honorable end with a minimum loss of life.

Q Are they concerned about the cost—and the draft call?

A It wasn't that so much as it was to get it over with, because, if it can be brought to a victorious end, your draft call, obviously, will stop, except for certain replacements, and your expenditures will diminish accordingly.

Let me make it as clear as crystal that I've said over and over that the colonial sin is not that we're in Vietnam. As Republicans, we must accept our share of responsibility by virtue of the pledges that were made in Geneva. I accept my share. I do not evade it. I have said that the real sin is that we've been there too long. It's become a war of attrition.

Who can say what the end will be? The war's impact has to show up in higher taxes, or in throwing overboard some other things that are seemingly desirable.

And the factor that you can never overlook is the bringing back of these boys who make the supreme sacrifice. Here's a lad who lands in a casket in a little town. Right away the weekly paper have a headline: "Joe is home." The funeral services are announced. The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other organizations will be there in uniform.

There'll be the squad that fires the salute. There are the fathers and mothers. "That could have been my youngster." And the further this goes, the more diffused that sentiment becomes. You can't escape it.

Q Do people blame one party or the other for Vietnam?

A It's not a case of assessing the blame. I've said to the President that I'm in his corner where our national security and interests are at stake. Let's get the war over and done with and do what is necessary to bring peace over there.

I think it's pretty generally conceded that Vietnam is the key to Southeast Asia. Shall this Red contagion continue to engulf the world, country by country and continent by continent? Who shall say what will happen if we relent?

Q Do you feel that President Johnson is following a policy that will, as you say, "get the war over and done with"?

A Yes, I think so.

Q Would you favor using nuclear weapons if necessary to end the Vietnam war?

A The day that Pandora's nuclear box is opened, no human being is able to tell what its ramifications will be. What will be the impact, the damage? What will it invite from those who also have bombs with nuclear warheads?

Q Will the use or misuse of nuclear weapons be an issue in this year's elections?

A I doubt it. I think that everybody in both parties has

always wanted to see that, first, restraint is exercised; and, second, that the final word rests in the most responsible hands. I can imagine a situation in which a field commander caught in a full-scale struggle saw the possibility that his whole Army corps was likely to be decimated. Should he have authority to employ nuclear weapons? But communication being what it is today, it takes only a jiffy to get to where you want to go for the word.

Q Some Republicans have been critical of Secretary of Defense McNamara. What is your view?

A I think Bob McNamara is a very able citizen. There isn't any question about that. However, Bob McNamara has not been trained in the military art. That's the difficulty. Civilian decisions are made that have high military impact.

Q How do you mean? Was the McNamara decision to cut back on bombers and rely more on missiles an example?

A Yes. In fact, that's the nub of the present controversy—whether the decisions on bombers and bases do not dangerously reduce our striking power when and if needed.

Q How do you feel about those decisions?

A I've always been rather restrained about comment in that field, not having expert knowledge of such matters. How would I pit my judgment, for instance, against that of Gen. Curtis LeMay, who has worked a lifetime with bombs—particularly with the Strategic Air Command—and whose business it is to think not just in terms of Vietnam, but in terms of the whole globe?

Q Do you feel that military men like General LeMay should have more voice in military decisions?

A Well, I have considerable confidence in Curtis LeMay. He worked at his trade. There was nothing sentimental about him. He's as down to earth as anybody I ever knew, and I think his judgment and those of men like him should be carefully taken into account.

AT ISSUE: ARMS SHORTAGES—

Q In 1965, Republicans in the House made quite an issue of shortages of military equipment in Vietnam. Will this be an issue this year?

A I would rather think so, and I can tell you why:

Certainly, one of the ablest and most conscientious Senators who ever sat in the U. S. Senate is John Stennis, of Mississippi. Now, he got concerned about this question of weapons. Did we have an adequate supply? Were we cannibalizing our equipment and supplies in other parts of the world to get enough for Vietnam?

As chairman of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, John Stennis called for an investigation. I understand that the report on that investigation is rather revealing. Strangely enough, only echoes of this report have been heard from time to time.

Q Hasn't this report been made public?

A The question always with a report like this is: How much of it can you safely release without showing your hand to the enemy? I have never been one to telegraph a punch to the enemy, or to disclose our weaknesses.

Q One more question on military matters: Will Republicans press for faster development of a defense against missiles?

A Yes, I think so, because what is there to keep these intercontinental missiles with their fabulous ranges from plying into our cities, unless we've got an antimissile missile that's reasonably effective, accurate, and on the beam? There is no defense, unless you want to go underground.

Q Would you favor spending the money to develop a de-