

O'Hara brokers votes for legislative success

By TIM RICHARD

"You've got to have the votes before you get to the floor," Jim O'Hara keeps saying.

A nine-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives, O'Hara boils down his approach to liberal legislation by deciding whether he can negotiate for "half a loaf now and come back for the other half later, or whether we should keep the heat on now."

O'Hara (D-Ill.) talked about the way he and other Democratic liberals have pushed labor, education and social legislation over the years in a recent talk to 18th District Democrats and in an interview.

"I STARTED OUT with the Democratic Party a long time ago," said O'Hara—one of the first members of his party to generate the Republican stronghold in the suburbs.

"Warren was where we worked the hardest because we had all those new residents out here. I worked the precincts in Shelby Township, and I'll bet you the shoes I wore out cost more than the money I collected in the Dollars for Democrats drive."

He talked of the ways of Congress: "The world's a pretty resistant place. You can't walk into an institution as complicated as the house of representatives, make a speech and expect the world to change. By the time someone makes a speech, the fight's over."

AFTER 18 YEARS in the house, O'Hara is seeking a change. Either he'll be nomi-

nated and elected to the senate in 1978, where he figures he can make progress by yards instead of inches, or he'll be back in Macomb County practicing law.

The remark about not changing the world with a speech seems aimed at Rep. Donald Riegle (D-Flint), another senate contender with an oratorical flair.

"We finally stopped the oil and gas lobby in their tracks," O'Hara said as he talked about the industry's efforts to get deregulation. "We gave 'em deregulation, all right, but we came up with a substitute. We've heard all this hogwash about the down-trodden, 'mom and pop' gas producer."

"We took all the little guys out of it (regulation)—anyone producing a billion cubic feet or less. We'll continue to regulate 15 companies, but they produce 70 percent of the gas."

O'HARA SPENDS MUCH of his time thinking about the relationship between the City of Detroit and its suburbs. Of efforts to aid big cities, he said, "I don't think we're dumping in dollars to cover deficits. I've been for counter-cyclical revenue sharing. It's a temporary device to help areas that have had great impacts from the recession."

"The plight of the cities is a long-term situation. I don't have any answers to that. I'm very distrustful of answers that have any compulsion—you know, keeping the cars out of the city."

"You have to figure out what's causing declines of cities. Crime is a major problem."

O'Hara was critical of the way a television special attacked the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for continuing to provide mortgage money in the city.

"I'VE TRIED to analyze what brings people to the suburbs," he went on. "The thing they like is that a suburb is a manageable size."

It's interesting the way the suburbs have developed. Poles have lived on the east side, moving up to Sterling Heights and Shelby Township. Italians have moved to St. Clair Shores and East Detroit. Hungarians to Lincoln Park, Allen Park and Melvindale.

"It's true that we have not cities and suburbs, but a series of small units held together by something. O'Hara sticks to basic issues of the bread-and-butter sort. He is a sponsor of the Kennedy-Corman national health insurance plan.

"But I'm not hung up on it. A reason I favor the Social Security Administration handling it is the miserable job Blue Cross



REP. JAMES O'HARA

has done in holding down costs. Those lab tests! They'll run you to death."

"WE OUGHT to start moving in the direction of national health insurance. I have my vision, but I'm ready to get started with something else."

"What I'm trying to say is, yes, I've been a co-sponsor, but we haven't got the votes. I'm willing to accept some changes and watering down—as long as taking part of the loaf is worthwhile and as long as we can come back for the rest later."

Not many years ago, O'Hara was one of the leaders of the most liberal group in Congress. Today he rates a 74 on the Americans for Democratic Action scale, and the new freshmen are running up scores in the 60s. O'Hara seems to be getting a little bit conservative—and he talks that way.

"The bureaucracy? The damndest I-dotting and I-crossing, petty. In the New Deal days, the courts were the problem. Now everything is administrative regulations."

"When government doesn't want to enforce a law, it damn well doesn't," he said, citing what he calls a failure of the government to apply the Occupational Health and Safety Act to farm workers harmed by powerful pesticides.

Despite the campaign for higher office, O'Hara boasts a good attendance record in the house. It's his style to be there and count the votes.

Thursday, April 29, 1978

OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC

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Center plans questionnaire

The Peace and National Priorities Center of Oakland County is planning a questionnaire for congressional candidates. A meeting to work on the questionnaire has been scheduled for 8 p.m., May 10, at Church of Our Saviour, on Middle Belt just south of Maple, West Bloomfield.

Volunteers are being sought for the project, which includes making up a questionnaire for congressional candidates in the August primary, mailing the questionnaire to all candidates who file in June, follow-up by letter and phone to obtain responses, and tabulation of answers and distribution of responses to press and local groups.



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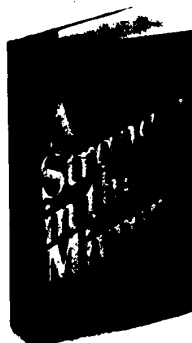
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