

Esch says

Senate needs sense of history

By TIM RICHARD



REP. MARVIN ESCH

to check on how existing laws and programs are working until new

In 1968 the then-freshman congressman wrote the last chapter in a party publication called "Republican Review" in which he argued that Congress was failing to fulfill one of its major functions by its inability to review government performance.

He is still saying so. And he is saying the Senate is the place to fulfill the function of legislative oversight.

"All kinds of efforts are being started now," Esch said. He cited steps toward zero-base budgeting (making an agency justify its budgeting from scratch each year rather than taking last year's figure and adding a percentage). He also cited discussions of "sunsetting" laws (where an agency's life would expire in a certain number of years unless Congress reviews and renews it).

Only half-jokingly. Esch suggests that Congress pass no new laws for a year. He would then use that time to investigate how present laws and programs work.

He would have departmental secretaries, including transportation secretary, to spend 14 and 15 sped one week a month in hearings on Capitol Hill "to see how the legislative mandate is being carried out."

ANOTHER ESCH method is to do away with congressional hearings in which a committee stands like an appellate court, takes testimony from witnesses, one at a time.

Instead, he said, experts should be called in for a group conversation, with congressmen and staffers later joining in. He says this eliminates the flamboyant taking of hard, fixed positions associated with congressional posturing and television news coverage.

The method is already being tried in the House Science and Technology Committee, of which he is a member.

ESCH'S DECISION to run for the Senate was something of a surprise to those who know him well. In past years, he had professed no interest in the Senate because he felt it would mean selling his soul to major interest groups.

"The new campaign laws," he answered. "The new laws make it a whole new world. I've been conducting five or six fundraisers a week at \$75 a ticket. You used to have to go to a few big contributors and get \$10,000 or \$20,000 or \$50,000 apiece. Now you have to go to a lot more people."

Now Michigan's most liberal Republican representative talks about the problems of industry a lot more these days. How auto companies know how to make vehicles but the federal government interferes with productivity; you know the kind of thing out of former Sen. Kellogg. Congress wastes a lot of time and money wading through a 1,000-page lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission.

"WHAT MAKES HIM different from other congressional Republicans is that Esch says he believes in "active government" that will aid education, promote economic security and look out for welfare.

It's not the anti-Washington feeling of the Wallaceites and deppreachers Republicans, he says. And he sums it up:

"For any of them goals to be achieved, the first priority must be a government that works."

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