

Senate needs sense of history

By TIM RICHARD

The United States Senate is an exclusive club of 100 members while the house of representatives is a gaggle of 435 where each frog has only a tiny share of the pond.

But Marvin L. Esch, a 16-year house veteran, has another reason for wanting to graduate to the upper chamber. "The senate needs a sense of history."

He goes on: "With a sense of history, a group which stands for election only every six years could decide where the country ought to be five or 10 years from now. Most importantly, the senate can develop a procedure of legislative oversight, a system of effective controls over the programs we've already passed."

ESCH, an Ann Arbor Republican, senses a strong "anti-Washington feeling" among audiences across Michigan.

Yet the 2nd District congressman is the only one of four men in the GOP senate primary who has spent more than a couple of years in office there.

Each was one of the "Class of '66" which then Gov. George Romney pulled in on his coattails. And despite his five terms in Washington in the anti-Washington years, Esch is leading the pack in the primary, according to the polls.

The former speech professor from the University of Michigan and Wayne State University is crisscrossing the state just as hard as he crisscrossed the unknown territory of Livonia four years ago when that suburb was added to his repositioned congressional district. He carried Livonia even though his Democratic opponent was a Livonia legislator.

The guts of his campaign theme is that Congress must do a vastly more efficient job, not of passing more laws and programs, but of making certain the present laws and programs are meeting people's needs.

In an auto trip from his campaign headquarters in Southfield to a speaking engagement in Grosse Pointe, Esch, 48, puzzled aloud over the question of whether Congress can actually make government perform better.

"PEOPLE SEE government as an adversary, interfering with how they live with the performance of industry," with local government. I've had more response to this from audiences than from any other at trade.

The Environmental Protection Agency should be of assistance to communities. Instead the attitude of EPA seems to be: Here's one more form to fill out.

The CETA bill, Comprehensive Employment Training Act, which I wrote, is another I hear complaints of lots of bureaucratic regulations, but the intent of the law is to let them, the communities, run it. That's what they're supposed to do.

Our response in the last 10 years in Congress has been one more law, one more law. It's legislative redundancy.

ESCH'S THEME about Congress' need

Milliken asks for sunset law

The sun never sets on Michigan now, but Gov. William Milliken says he has directed his staff to work with legislative leaders to develop "sunset" legislation.

Under the sunset law concept, specific programs are given an expiration date at the time of their inception. To be continued beyond their expiration date, they must be individually reviewed and justified.

In a letter to House Minority Leader Dennis Cawthorne, Milliken concurred with Cawthorne's recommendation to study the feasibility of incorporating sunset legislation into the 1977-78 Executive Budget.

Milliken has employed the concept previously in creating various state offices, such as the Office of Drug Abuse, the Office of Youth Services and the Office of Services to the Aging.

Milliken told Cawthorne in the letter, "There is obviously some duplication of governmental programs and agencies."

It is also apparent that after a period of time, many programs become redundant and in some cases totally ineffective. I am interested in a mechanism which would create an incentive for periodic and comprehensive legislative evaluation of existing programs and agencies.

I believe that accountability of government in the public eye would be improved by looking seriously at this kind of legislation.

Milliken spoke in favor of sunset legislation at a recent National Governors' Conference.

He said that while there may be problems in ensuring that such legislation is carefully developed, it "is well worth the risk if it helps make government responsive to the people."

The governor also told his fellow governors there is danger that functions at various levels of government can become "unresponsive, unred and arrogant."



REP. MARVIN ESCH

to check on how existing laws and programs are working isn't new.

In 1968, the then-freshman congressman wrote the last chapter in a party publication called "Republican Papers" 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 appropriation from scratch each year rather than taking last year's figure and adding a percentage). He also cited discussions of "sunset" 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, assistant secretaries and civil servants in grades 14 and 15 spend 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 the traditional congressional hearing in which a committee, sitting 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 focused no interest in the senate because he felt it would mean selling his soul to major interest groups.

What changed his mind?

"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 from them."

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 requiring the filling out of forms, how Kellogg Co. must spend a lot of time and money wading through a 3,000-page lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission.

WHAT MAKES HIM different from other anti-Washingtoners, however, 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 depression-era Republicans, he says. And he sums it up:

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

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