Chapter 10 – Special Session

On October 23, 1947, Pres. Harry Truman called a special session of the Congress to convene on November 17, giving two reasons for it – price inflation and the “crisis in Western Europe.” The President had met with congressional leaders on September 29 and asked the Appropriations and Foreign Relations committees of both Houses to meet as early as possible to address a $248 million shortfall in winter aid for Europe, indicating he might call a special session if he were assured the money would be forthcoming. On October 1, the President asked again that the committees meet, and the foreign affairs committees announced a joint meeting for November 10.[1]

While including inflation within the call irritated Republican congressional leaders, Truman had periodically warned about price rises through the year, which fit with the Administration’s inconsistent support for the now virtually eliminated price controls. Price inflation and foreign aid were also related matters. Overseas demand for American goods, funded by aid, arguably contributed to rising prices domestically, and rising prices reduced the amount of American aid.[2]

The Congress should not have been greatly surprised by the call for the special session; nevertheless, it was a disruption in members’ lives – financially, politically, and personally.

In his speech to the joint session on November 17, Truman said prices for household goods had risen 23% since mid-1946. He proposed a ten-point anti-inflation program: (1) Restoration of controls on consumer credit, (2) regulation of commodity trading, (3) export controls, (4) control of the allocation of transportation facilities, (5) control of livestock and poultry marketing, (6) expansion of agricultural conservation services and encouragement of foreign agricultural production, (7) control of the distribution of scarce commodities, (8) rent control, (9) rationing, (10) price control.

While the domestic requests had an obvious political objective whatever their policy merits, it was unexpected that a Republican Congress would revisit the controls that Party had so condemned. On the other hand, the Administration request for $597 million in aid for Europe resulted eventually in an appropriation of $522 million plus $18 million for Chiang Kai-shek of Nationalist China.[3]

The first day of the special session also brought six new members, who were sworn in after special elections during the intersession.

Abraham Multer, Democrat of Brooklyn, was appointed to Banking and Currency on December 4.

Ken Regan, Democrat of Texas, was given a place on the House Administration Committee on December 4.

Franklin Lichtenwalter, Republican of Pennsylvania, went on the Select Committee on Small Business on December 15.

Ralph Harvey, Republican of Indiana, on December 18 was placed on the Expenditures in the Executive Departments and House Administration committees. Harvey had told a newspaper that he wanted a fiscal or agricultural committee. Then it was reported that he told Majority Leader Charles Halleck that it did

[1] Kalijarvi, 29, 30, 34.
[2] Donovan (1977), 339.
[3] Donovan (1977), 340-1.

not matter which committee he was assigned to. He would report in his autobiography that he, ambitiously, requested Appropriations.[4]

William McCulloch, Republican of Ohio, was appointed to the Judiciary Committee on December 18.

Charles Potter, Republican of Michigan, was placed on Merchant Marine and Fisheries on December 18.

A seventh joined the House on November 28, Donald Nicholson, Republican of Massachusetts, and on December 18 secured a seat on the Banking and Currency Committee.

One of the Class of ’46, Charles Kersten of Wisconsin, would not attend the special session until November 25. Mitchell Jenkins of Pennsylvania would have surgery on his throat on November 28 and be in hospital until December 2.

Speaker Joseph Martin announced on opening day of the special session appointments made on July 30 to a Joint Committee on Housing, including Republican Charles Fletcher of California, chaired by Rep. Ralph Gamble of New York and Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, as well as appointments on July 29 to a Select Committee on Foreign Aid, including Republicans Kingsland Macy of New York and Richard Nixon of California, chaired by Charles Eaton of New Jersey.

The sponsor of HCRes 104, creating the Joint Committee on Housing, was Jesse Wolcott, Chair of Banking and Currency, who reportedly was determined not to report the Taft-Ellender-Wagner housing bill. Helen Gahagan Douglas (D CA) had initiated a discharge petition in the regular session for the bill, but had failed to get the necessary 218 names. Among the Class, Robert Jones of Alabama, George Smathers of Florida, Henderson Lanham of Georgia, Charles Deane of North Carolina, Carl Albert and Toby Morris of Oklahoma, and Bryan Dorn of South Carolina, all Democrats, had signed the petition.[5]

Christian Herter (R MA) had sponsored HRes 296 to create the Select Committee on Foreign Aid. Secretary of State George Marshall’s proposal for a massive program of aid to Europe was the precipitating factor. The Committee began its work with a trip to Europe, divided into five subcommittees. They arrived at Southampton on September 2 on the *Queen Mary* and were received by Prime Minister Clement Attlee of the Labour Party, which the dominant party in Congress tended to view with alarm. Despite this start, 14 of the 17 committee members would support the Marshall Plan; Nixon backed it within his District with pieces for the local newspapers and a speaking tour. Macy would later miss the vote authorizing the Plan.[6]

Nixon returned to the floor on November 24, the fourth legislative day of the special session, to contribute to the House Un-American Activities Committee case against Dalton Trumbo, the second of ten screenwriters charged with contempt of Congress. Nixon had sat in with the subcommittee that included Classmate Richard Vail in the hearings that had begun October 20 in the Old House Office Building. The hearings had attracted the attention of reportedly over a hundred reporters. Among the witnesses were Walt Disney, Gary Cooper, Robert Montgomery, Ronald Reagan, and Adolph Menjou, but the more specific accusations of communists came from Jack Warner, head of production for filmmaker

---

[4] *Greensburg Daily News*, November 18, 1947. *National Road Traveler*, January 29, 1948. Harvey, 65.

[5] A discharge petition signed by a majority of the membership brings a bill to the floor that its referring committee or the Rules Committee had failed to report. Successful discharge was rare, although the threat itself sometimes moved a bill. The last bill as of 1948 that become law via a petition was the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. Bolling (1968), 93. Drew Pearson, May 27, 1948.

[6] Conrad Black, 100, 101. Schamel, Rephlo, Roos, Kepley, Coren, and Bradsher.

Warner Brothers, and from the mother of Ginger Rogers. Vail contributed to the case on the floor against the first writer, Albert Maltz.[7]

Twelve writers, five directors, a producer, and an actor had been brought in as unfriendly witnesses, constituting in effect public accusations of disloyalty, by HUAC. Those who resisted the right of the Committee to interrogate them became known as the Hollywood Ten, the writer Trumbo being the most prominent in the movie industry. Their communist affiliations had been relatively open. Now facing blacklisting for their politics, whatever the Committee did, they apparently felt they had little to lose by their actions.[8]

The vote to charge Maltz was a roll call with the yeas carrying 347-17, with Republican Claude Bakewell of Missouri and Democrats John Blatnik of Minnesota, John Carroll of Colorado, and Frank Karsten of Missouri among the nays. Democrats Dorn, Hamilton Jones of North Carolina, and Olin Teague of Texas, and Republicans Kersten, McCulloch, Jacob Javits and David Potts of New York, Edward Miller of Maryland, E.A. Mitchell of Indiana, and Thomas Owens of Illinois did not vote. Bakewell was the only Republican member of the House to vote nay.

Javits spoke to the Trumbo matter, saying that to call a man *communist* “is libelous *per se*,” but the Ten were asked to respond to the potential libel and should have answered. Nevertheless, he found the “operations” of HUAC “a good deal lacking.” The Committee allows people to be accused without evidence and then asks them to deny the charge, he argued. This is “trying an individual’s character, we just do not operate that way in the United States.” HUAC should be dissolved and replaced by a joint committee with “rules and regulations to protect the character of individuals appearing before it….” Javits introduced HRes 378 to do that, but it did not make it out of committee.[9]

Nixon rose to suggest that the issue with regard to Trumbo and the others was a simple one; they refused to answer the questions including their membership in the Communist Party that were put to them by the subcommittee. He went on to say, “the Communist Party is a subversive organization which attempts to impose upon free people a totalitarian system of government by any means, legal or illegal.” But … “It is not a crime to be a member of the Communist Party and consequently the guaranty of the fifth amendment against self-incrimination has no application whatever.”[10]

Trumbo was cited for contempt on division by 240-16. The rest of the Ten were disposed of by voice vote.[11]

The primary legislative reason for the special session was the emergency aid to Europe, which was labeled “interim aid” because of the impending Marshall Plan. The Foreign Affairs Committee bill, HR 4604, introduced on December 2, came up for six days of debate on December 4, and passed the House on December 11 by voice vote.

Members of the Class of ’46 had already weighed in on the floor concerning European aid, often merging the emergency aid request with the developing Marshall Plan, before the interim bill materialized:

---

[7] Goodman, 207-10.
[8] Goodman, 210-4.
[9] *Congressional Record*, November 24, 1947, 10782.
[10] *Congressional Record*, November 24, 1947, 10792.
[11] The Ten were sentenced to either six or twelve months in jail and each fined $1000. The Supreme Court eventually denied certiorari. When they got out of jail they continued to be blacklisted. Goodman, 222-3.

- Democrat John Kennedy of Massachusetts on November 20 on the critical need for aid to Italy.
- Republican Katharine St. George of New York, also on November 20, blaming the Administration for the food crisis in Europe by allowing the Soviet Union to take over the food producing parts of the continent. She advocated total American control of any aid distribution and wanted aid to be collateralized loans.
- Republican Harold Youngblood of Michigan on November 24, complaining about the Administration requesting aid while permitting goods purchased with American dollars to go to the Soviet Union.
- Republican John Davis Lodge of Connecticut on November 25, pursuing his favorite issue of aid to Italy.
- Bakewell on November 28, recommending the Marshall Plan be predicated on a vision of Europe that thoroughly anticipated the state of the European Union and NATO in 2002.
- Democrat Joe Evins of Tennessee and Republican George MacKinnon of Minnesota, also on November 28, commenting on Pete Jarman's (D AL) complaint about the slowness of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on which he served, producing an emergency aid bill. Jarman said it had begun working on November 12, before the special session convened, but had been less than diligent in its activities.

In addition, Republican Melvin Snyder of West Virginia on November 28 introduced HJRes 267 to authorize creation of a charitable program for foreign relief. Whether this was to supplant public appropriations or not, it failed to make it from committee.

Debate on HR 4604 involved many of the Class, including Democrat Edward Garmatz of Maryland and Nicholson, who made their maiden contributions on the floor. Republican Kenneth Keating of New York got to chair a Committee of the Whole session, the only appearance of a member of the Class in such a roll in 1947. Few of the Class, however, directly addressed support or, especially, opposition to the bill as a whole, but rather a concern with what Jarman described as "tweedledee and tweedledum."[12]

Javits, a major debate participant (of course), summarized opposition to the bill as (1) it would not stop communism, (2) recipients would not know where the aid came from, (3) it commits the United States to a long-term program, and (4) it bleeds the US white and it increases inflation, and then proceeded to attempt to defeat those arguments. He also complained about special interest amendments loading the bill down but himself had contributed in committee to the creation by the bill of a National Food Conservation Commission.

Attempts to reinvigorate the American Merchant Marine (Republican Willis Bradley and Democrats Garmatz and Hugh Meade of Maryland), to eliminate non-essential items from relief (Republicans Frederic Coudert of New York and Owens), to restrict purchases in various ways to avoid domestic shortages or inflation (Owens and Democrats Don Wheeler of Georgia and John Bell Williams of Mississippi: The last's amendment to restrict was supplanted by Wheeler's amendment, which was rejected), to sunset the act on June 30, 1948 (Owen's amendment – accepted), to require repatriation of POWs (Keating's three attempts at amendment were all ruled non-germane), to collateralize foreign assets (Keating again, who withdrew the amendment), to require or enable monitoring of aid (Kersten and Democrat Monroe Redden of North Carolina, who successfully introduced such an amendment), and to require equivalent aid within the US (Snyder's amendment, rejected) were only the Class tip of the more inclusive iceberg.

---

[12] *Congressional Record*, November 28, 1947, 10946.

Republicans Bradley, Coudert, Raymond Burke of Ohio, Donald Jackson of California, Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania, Antoni Sadlak of Connecticut (reluctantly), Abe Goff of Idaho (while attacking the Administration), Javits (forcefully), Lodge (rah Italy!), St. George (contending that it was just a welfare bill, since nothing would stop European peoples from embracing fascism or communism), and Democrat Dorn (while preferring more air force spending) spoke in support of the bill.

Among the Class, only Democrat Glen Johnson of Oklahoma and Owens spoke directly in opposition. Johnson argued the aid would only feed French communists and moved unsuccessfully to recommit the bill. Owens said he was sent to Washington to reduce bureaucracy and spending, not increase them.

Others of the Class who spoke, less directly, were Democrats Deane and Morris and Republicans Mitchell, Franklin Maloney of Pennsylvania, Dayton Phillips of Tennessee, and Thor Tollefson of Washington. We should not forget that Wheeler was concerned that grain provided under the act might be used to make alcoholic beverages.

When the conference report, with S 1774 replacing HR 4604, came up on December 15, it was accepted 313-82. Among the Class of ’46, opponents were Republicans John Sanborn of Idaho, Vail, Robert Twyman, Owens, and Edward Jenison of Illinois (the last two paired against), Harvey of Indiana, Herbert Meyer and Wint Smith of Kansas, Youngblood of Michigan, Albert Reeves and Parke Banta of Missouri, McCulloch of Ohio, George Sarbacher and Carroll Kearns of Pennsylvania, Phillips of Tennessee, Russell Mack of Washington, Francis Love of West Virginia, and Democrats Otto Passman of Louisiana, Williams of Mississippi, Johnson (paired) of Oklahoma, and Dorn of South Carolina (in spite of his earlier statement of support). Republicans Macy and Potts of New York and James Scoblick of Pennsylvania did not vote. The rest of the Class voted for or were paired for the report. Overall, opposition came from Midwestern Republicans and Southern Democrats, primarily from the former who opposed the report by a slight majority.

Between passage in the House and acceptance of the conference report, Bradley had taken the floor to complain that through “legalized thievery” the country was being asked to send funds to support people like fifteen British actors who had offered congratulations to the Hollywood Ten, but he voted for the report.[13]

A number of members had spent the intersession touring Europe and wished to report on it. Maloney released a report on his personal trip to Europe. On July 15 he had moved from Merchant Marine and Fisheries to the Foreign Affairs Committee but was not appointed to the Herter Committee. Supposedly he got the more prestigious committee seat, vacated by the death of Charles Gerlach of Pennsylvania, over other Keystaters Wallace Chadwick and Scoblick because he was isolationist. He had voted against aid to Greece and Turkey and emergency aid and opposed Voice of American funding, but then his report was favorable to the Marshall Plan.[14]

On the day of the conference report, Jackson addressed the House on his visit to Greece with Teague, independent of the Herter Committee, and introduced HCRes 122 in favor of an international police force there, which never made it from committee. Jackson was unimpressed with the results of the American aid to Greece, saying “only minor progress” had been made, malnutrition was widespread, foods unappreciated by the Greek palate were being supplied, and the Greek government was warehousing rather than distributing goods. He preferred a military rather than an economic approach.[15]

[13] *Congressional Record*, December 11, 1947, 11275.
[14] *The Pittsburgh Press*, August 10, December 11, 1947.
[15] *Congressional Record*, December 15, 1947, 11422-3.

The next day Javits spoke to the House on his personal visit to Europe, but then wandered far from his expressed concern for the needs there to the need for price and rent controls in America. Globalism for this member tended to be truly global. The following day he tried and failed to amend a supplemental appropriation bill, HR 4748, to increase funds for the French. Kersten also tried to amend the bill to add two million dollars for school books and protective clothing for railroad workers in Germany and Austria. This somewhat curious earmarking also failed.

Tangential to the provision of tax funds for foreign aid was the introduction by a number of members of bills to provide for free or reduced postage for private relief parcels. Potts, Youngblood, Keating, Blatnik, and Kersten among the Class sponsored such bills, none being reported.[16] The same fate met three other House bills introduced by more senior members, but a Senate bill, S 1813, did clear committee on the next to last day of the special session.[17]

On the last day of the session Truman sent Congress a special message outlining the Marshall Plan - $17 billion in grants and loans from April 1, 1948, to June 30, 1952 for all the countries outside the Soviet sphere in Europe as well as Turkey, except Spain and Finland.

Much of the remainder of the legislative activity in the special session was a carry-over from the regular session.

The earlier agitation over Palestine, mostly in defense of Jewish settlement, was capped by the start of the Palestine war on November 29 as the UN voted for partition. Javits was the only member of the Class to make a statement on the floor, which he did on both December 2 and 18.

Veterans benefits continued to motivate members. Veterans' Affairs Chair Edith Nourse Rogers kept trying to get bills to the floor but also complained about the Veterans' Administration, eliciting vocal support for her position from Chadwick, Albert, St. George, and Morris.

The housing problem persisted. Fletcher introduced HR 4675 to increase the Federal Housing Authority's mortgage guarantee authorization. The bill was reported, then replaced by Banking and Currency Chair Wolcott's bill, which was enacted. Fletcher, Javits, MacKinnon, Smathers, and Youngblood weighed in on the floor.

Spending battles continued. HR 4748, the so-called Third Supplemental Appropriation bill, gathered comments from Albert, Robert Jones, Lanham, and Morris (needs more money for rural electrification), Chadwick and William Dawson of Utah (more money for Indians), Javits (amendment to aid France and Italy – rejected), and Kersten (amendment to aid Germany - rejected).

The perceived threat from communist unions was not eradicated by Taft-Hartley. Youngblood charged that communism was rampant in Detroit, having "a stranglehold on the labor unions."[18]

A new issue that arose on the floor was Republican accusations of Administration officials speculating in commodities. Given that the President, in the first ever televised speech from the White House on October 5 had blamed commodity speculation for inflated grain costs, involvement by officials, if true, could be a particular embarrassment. The Council of Economic Advisers and the Secretary of Agriculture had begun attempting to restrain speculation since March, with little cooperation from the commodity

---

[16] HR 4530, HR 4598, HR 4616, HR 4740, HR 4753, HR 4791.
[17] The other House bills were HR 4459, HR 4684, HR 4750.
[18] *Congressional Record*, December 2, 1947, 10993.

exchanges. Truman's telecast improved their cooperation. The Secretary followed up with a statement on October 9 that some of the speculators were indeed "public figures."[19]

The issue languished in the special session until Republican presidential candidate Harold Stassen named a name in a speech in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, on December 10. Stassen charged that Edwin Pauley had made $3 million in speculating on commodity prices over the last three years. Pauley was a California oilman, who as treasurer of the Democratic National Committee had been part of a group that worked to get Vice Pres. Henry Wallace replaced by Sen. Truman in 1944. Now he was special assistant to the secretary of the Army. In 1946 Pauley's alleged cronyism with Truman, who had wanted to make him undersecretary of the Navy, had figured publicly and prominently in the resignation of Harold Ickes as Secretary of the Interior.[20]

The afternoon after Stassen's nighttime speech, Fred Busbey (R IL) and MacKinnon introduced HRes 400 and HRes 401 to investigate commodity speculation. On the following legislative day, Hugh Scott (R PA) accused Pauley of insider trading, broadening the attack on the Administration to "Argentine deals" and "Maritime Commission contracts" without specifics.[21] The next day it was August Andresen (R MN) who took up the cudgel on the floor, but allowed that Pauley had done nothing illegal. On the 17th Andresen introduced HRes 404 to investigate the speculation, which would be enacted the next day. In the meantime, Republicans Robert McGarvey of Pennsylvania, Javits, and MacKinnon took to the floor, as well as eight others not from the Class. HCRes 124 was also introduced to sponsor a joint investigation with the Senate. Three joint resolutions were introduced to push the secretary of agriculture to release names. All of these went nowhere.

On December 19 the Special Committee on Commodity Transactions was formed with Andresen as chair and Republican Jenkins and Democrat Carroll as members. Also on the 19th, the House passed SJRes 170 to authorize the secretary of agriculture to release the names of commodity traders. Five days later the list was given to the Joint Committee on the Economic Report. It included the name of Gen. Wallace Graham, Truman's White House physician.[22]

Historian Robert Donovan would write that the commodities incident "foreshadowed the kinds of disclosures and allegations of corruption that were to plague Truman in his second term…."[23]

Truman had called a special session to enact emergency aid for Europe but also to try and place the onus for not controlling inflation on the Republican Congress. The reluctant response was HJRes 273, the so-called Wolcott Anti-inflation bill, and SJRes 167 to stabilize commodity prices. The former extended export controls and rail transport controls, and authorized food conservation and foreign food production initiatives. Democrats in Congress and the President discounted its effects and every Democratic vote in the House was opposed to it. Twenty-six Republicans voted against it, including Class members Smith, Javits, Thruston Morton of Kentucky, and John Brophy of Wisconsin. Keating defended it on the floor.[24]

---

[19] Markham, 111-2. Donovan (1977), 349.
[20] McCullough, 295-301, 314, 483-4. Donovan (1977), 349.
[21] *Congressional Record*, December 15, 1947, 11415.
[22] *Medford Mail Tribune*, December 24, 1947. Donovan (1977), 349-50.
[23] Donovan (1977), 349.
[24] "Highlights of the 80th Congress 1947," *CQ Almanac 1947*, 3rd ed., on-line.

SJRes 167 gave the Secretary of Agriculture authority to regulate allocations of certain commodities. Debate in the House was far more about the closed rule under which the resolution was debated than the substance of the bill.

Finally, as far as activity by the Class of ’46 went, six of the top eight members of the Class of ’46 in the (not to be taken too seriously) activity metric in the regular session were among the top eight in floor activity in the special session. The exceptions were objectors Carroll, whose floor activity in the special session consisted of the introduction of a public bill, and Potts, who introduced a public bill and made an address about oil shipments to the Soviet Union. Their places in the top eight in the special session were taken by Kersten and St. George. Republicans Paul Dague of Pennsylvania and Jenison had shown no floor activity in the regular session, and their slate was still clean after the special session.

Twelve of the Class saw private bills they had introduced in the regular session reported by committee in the special session. None were yet enacted, but they would carry over to 1948. They were Democrats Kennedy (HR 1912), Laurie Battle of Virginia (HR 3927), and Omar Burleson (HR 3159) and Frank Wilson (HR 2218) of Texas, and Republicans Coudert (HR 896), Keating (HR 3224), Scoblick (HR 3300), Jackson (HR 927), Youngblood (HR 2269), Caleb Boggs (HR 3061), and Charles Russell of Nevada (HR 1572 and HR 3849).

Macy introduced two resolutions that passed the House in the special session. HRes 403 was to authorize the Public Works Committee to investigate “conspiratorial practices” in sales of commodities, and HRes 373 funded the investigation. Macy persisted in labeling the practices “black markets.”[25]

The special session adjourned on December 19 after 18 legislative days over 33 calendar days, and most members of Congress could go home for 17 days before the second regular session of the 80th Congress began on January 6, 1948.

[25] *Congressional Record*, November 24, 1947, 10819; December 15, 1947, 11430.