

Chapter 41 – Democratic Zenith: The 1976 Election

The most startling result of the 1976 elections to the House of Representatives was that only two of the 70 Watergate Babies first elected in November 1974 were defeated for reelection. A third lost a run for the Senate. Apart from three Democrats who joined the 94th Congress as a result of special elections, nine more brand-new House Democrats were elected in November 1976. These twelve are often lumped with the 1974 crop as an expanded Watergate Babies set of 79 in the 95th House.

The next most startling result of the November 1976 contest was that the ousting of Republican Pres. Gerald Ford by Democrat Jimmy Carter had virtually no effect on the composition of the House. The number of Democrats in that body increased by exactly one over the results of the November 1974 election. It was said that Carter had no coattails. A better interpretation might be that the Democratic Party had reached its natural zenith as a result of the 1974 elections. There were 292 Democrats and 143 Republicans in the 95th Congress. After the 1964 Goldwater debacle there were 295 Democrats. There would not be that many Democrats again in the House.

Regional shifts were few. Democrats picked up three seats in Pennsylvania and one in New York while losing one in New Jersey. The five Middle Atlantic states were 61-27 Democratic. There were no shifts in New England, remaining 17-8 Democratic. In the Midwest, Democrats lost one seat each in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri, while picking up two seats in Ohio and one each in Nebraska and Kansas. The West North Central balance remained 20-15 Democratic, while the East North Central slipped a Democratic seat to 48-38 Democratic. In the West Democrats lost a seat each in Montana and Utah and picked up a seat each in Arizona and California. The Mountain states had a one seat Democratic slippage to 10-9 Democratic and the Pacific states a one seat Republican loss to 41-16 Democratic.

The South remained heavily Democratic despite Dixiecrats, Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, and Richard Nixon's southern strategy. Democrats did lose a seat each in Virginia and Oklahoma but gained one in Texas. The census South was 95-30 Democratic. The Confederate South was 81-27. As in the 94th Congress, Southern Democrats were only 28% of the Party's membership in the 95th House.

Three of the six remaining members of the Class of '46 decided that 1976 was a good time to leave the House. All six were Democrats and given the dominance of their Party in the House, the Senate, and the presidency, and the fact that all three reached positions of power, the question to be answered is why now?

Two of the three had had heart attacks and cited health as one reason to retire. None were very old, turning 64, 66, and 68 in 1976; but health care has come a long way since then, especially in the treatment of cardiovascular problems. From a peak around 1970, mortality due to cardiovascular disease began to fall. The recognition of the need for a rapid medical response, the spread of procedures such as bypass surgery and angioplasty, the development of pharmaceuticals that reduced blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, and thrombosis, and the reduction in tobacco smoking, all have had a positive effect. These three retirees would live 21, 7, and 23 years after they left the House.¹

By now, though, 46 of the 109 members of the Class of '46 had died at an average age of 69, 70 if the two who were murdered and killed by a train are excluded. The 63 who died after 1976 lived until 81 on average, a substantial difference.

¹ Davis Jones, 12.

Threats of being ousted by their congressional districts were remote. All were considered safe. One had a primary opponent in 1974 but bested him with 82% of the vote. Another last had to battle for renomination in 1972, taking 78%. The third had not faced a primary challenger since 1964. None had a Republican opponent in 1974. Two defeated their 1972 Republican opponents with 74% and 81% of the vote. The third had not seen a Republican since 1968.

Redistricting did not occur after 1974 in any of their districts or of the three other members of the Class.

One faced allegations of alcoholism and was within the penumbra of an investigation of possibly illegal activities connected with aggressiveness on the part of the government of South Korea or of actors associated with that government in trying to influence American policy or perhaps just to make a buck. This may have been a straw on the back of the camel.

The biggest incentive to retirement, however, may simply have been that these three men, who were in the House 30 years, had outlived the changes in the institution. The reforms and the reformers had become too much. In particular, the certainty of seniority that they waited 30 years to cash in, was no longer as bankable. They were outmoded and tired.

The first to announce his retirement was Robert Jones of Alabama. On February 9, 1976, he “caught almost everyone by surprise,” saying thirty years were enough and that “I have earned the right to go home and enjoy the years ahead at a slower pace.” He did not cite ill health, and there was no public knowledge of the same. He would live another 21 years.²

Democrat Joe Evins of Tennessee was next, saying on March 1, 1976, that “health considerations, plus the increasingly heavy burden of the workload” were the reason.³ Evins suffered a heart attack in 1972. He had another seven years of life after retirement.

The real kicker was the departure of Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma. There had been speculation galore, but Albert said for years that he wanted to retire in 1978, when he would be 70, and more recently that we wanted one term as speaker with a Democratic president. But on June 5, 1976, he said, “I am 68 years old, in good health and there are other things I want to do while I am young enough to do them.” Later, in his autobiography, he would write, “My doctors told me that my heart just would not take too much more.” His heart attack was ten years in the past and he would live 23 years after retirement. It is also likely that the prospect of die-hard Washington-outsider Jimmy Carter as president would not fulfill his goal as speaker.⁴

Albert was beset. His Korean-American staffer was accused of infidelity with another member of the House and, more importantly, was enmeshed in an investigation of bribery and espionage by South Korea and South Koreans. On February 22, 1976, *The Daily Oklahoman* called for Albert to retire, saying he was unrepresentative of Oklahoma, “incapable of exercising any forthright leadership on issues,” and drank too much. On May 31, 1976, *Time* claimed that Representative Wayne Hays used Albert’s hideaway office

² *The Anniston Star*, February 9 & 10, 1976.

³ *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington), March 1, 1976.

⁴ *CQWR*, January 4, 1975, 3-4; January 25, 1975, 213; September 20, 1975, 1994; June 12, 1976, 1491. Albert with Goble, 372. Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews (1975), 700. Albert makes no mention of Carter whatsoever in his autobiography.

in the Capitol for dalliances with Hays' staffer Elizabeth Ray and others. *The Washington Post* put Hays and Ray on its front page eleven days straight in May and June.⁵

Albert would leave after six years as Speaker. Evins retired after ten years as chair of an Appropriations subcommittee. Robert Jones had two years as Chair of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation.

The Anniston Star of northern Alabama, but not of Jones' district, at his retirement lauded him: "He put the Eisenhower interstate program on a pay-as-you-go basis. He worked out a successful plan for the sustained growth of the Tennessee Valley Authority." "[He] shaped essential legislation in waterways, pollution, power and public construction." "As a man of independence and deep integrity...." "He never forgot he was a man from Scottsboro...."⁶

Olin Teague and Omar Burleson of Texas had no inclination to leave in 1976. Burleson had had no primary opponent since 1966 and no Republican challenger since 1964. Teague had had no primary contest since 1964, but Ron Godbey announced on January 8. Godbey possessed a law degree but had been a TV weatherman in the Dallas-Fort Worth market since 1966.⁷ While being a weatherman might not seem to be a major recommendation for a congressional position, it is a role that brings substantial name recognition and often a great deal of personal affection from viewers. Those few minutes daily were often the most watched periods on television.

Godbey was 39, 27 years younger than Teague, and the Representative's stroke in 1975 kept him out of action for a period. It was the age and health difference rather than issues that formed the thrust of Godbey's campaign. Teague fought back with a purported good bill of health from the Mayo Clinic, a challenge for Godbey to follow him around in Washington for three days, and an eight-page ad in 28 newspapers. Godbey held Teague to 54%, easily his worst showing in a primary since 1946, and took the Fort Worth area.⁸

The sixth Class member, Otto Passman of Louisiana, also drew a challenger for the nomination, but this was the norm since 1966. May 1976 brought Jerry Huckaby, 35, an MBA who left Western Electric to own and operate a major dairy farm. Huckaby had an issue, Passman's 1971 vote against a school prayer amendment. The challenger also might use a possible scandal, Koreagate.⁹

In 1969 during his round-the-world trip, Nixon visited the US territory of Guam and announced what eventually came to be called the Nixon Doctrine: The US would provide material to defend a nation against aggression, but not manpower. This seemed to presage the elimination of American military forces from South Korea, which numbered 67,000 in 1969, and to be a repeat of Secretary of State Dean Acheson's omission of the country from the American defense perimeter that was blamed by some for precipitating the invasion of the South by North Korea in 1950. The response of the South Korean government was to work to oppose the supposed withdrawal through espionage, bribes, and favors that collectively constituted Koreagate. Passman's on-and-off-again relationship with a sometime agent of the South

⁵ *CQ Almanac 1977*, 824. *The Lawton Constitution*, February 23, 1976. *Redlands Daily Facts*, May 31, 1976. *Sunday Gazette-Mail*, September 19, 1976.

⁶ *The Anniston Star*, February 10, 1976.

⁷ *The Waxahatchie Daily Light*, March 14, 1976. DFWRetroplex.com.

⁸ *The Eagle*, January 10, 1976. *Corsicana Daily Sun*, January 25, 1976. *CQWR*, April 24, 1976, 991; February 25, 1978, 497.

⁹ *The Alexandria Daily Town Talk*, May 4, July 27, 1976.

Korean government named Tongsun Park, centering around the sales of Louisiana rice to South Korea, resulted in *The Washington Post* series of articles and a Justice Department investigation.¹⁰

Passman's love of foreign junkets under the auspices of his Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, with a recurring stop in Hong Kong to indulge the Representative's passion for clothing and jewelry, fed into the Korean narrative. Passman's prominence in Washington on foreign aid was never a winner in north Louisiana, and his junkets were a loser than Huckaby harped on.¹¹

A curious sidelight or, given Louisiana politics, perhaps more than a sidelight, was the murder of Huckaby's media agent, Jim Leslie, in the midst of the campaign. Suspicion did not center on Passman, however, but rather on another politician, Public Safety Commissioner George D'Artois of Shreveport.¹²

Huckaby retired Passman with 53% of the vote. Passman, never having faced a Republican opponent, was not inclined to demonstrate Party loyalty and endorse Huckaby. Huckaby did, however, draw a Republican, about whom Passman proceeded to laud his "unimpeachable integrity" while accusing the Democrat of "misrepresentations." Nevertheless, Huckaby went on to win the seat, though by only about the same percentage by which he had beaten the incumbent.¹³

Teague saw the worst November challenge of his career. Republican Wes Mowery, 50 and living on a farm outside Fort Worth, was an oil rancher. His primary attack on the 66-year-old Representative was absenteeism, in which one could read age and illness. The *Corsicana Daily Sun* wrote that it followed Teague around DC for three days and reported how hard he was working. Teague explained his roll call voting absences to the reporter, "I have a bunch of metal in my leg and hips, and I'm not going to go over there 30 times a day just to show that I'm present." The Paper also noted that Teague has diabetes and circulation problems in his feet. While his worst November, Teague still took 66%.¹⁴

There would be only two members of the 109 Class of '46 returning to the 95th Congress. Both were Democrats and both were Texans.

Members of the Class of '46 who did not return to the House after 1976:

Carl Albert was a member of the House leadership from his fifth term, advancing from Whip to Majority Leader to Speaker for his last three terms. As such, he was highly participatory but not highly productive in enacted bills, though more so in resolutions. Much of his 3257 participations was mechanical, not addressing issues other than the running of the House. He was still second in speaking per session to Jacob Javits. He moved only fifteen floor amendments. Twelve were accepted; five of the mechanical variety, but others dealing with wheat (three), cotton, the soil bank, peanuts, and insecticides.

¹⁰ Nixon *Memoirs*, 394-5. Beisner, 327-8. Grossman, 208. Fred Martin, 13-4. *CQWR*, July 24, 1976, 1960. Boettcher, 127, 135, 141.

¹¹ *The Shreveport Times*, May 4, 1976. *The Monroe News-Star*, July 2, 1976. On travel, see reports by Drew Pearson, October 30, 1962; March 10, November 30, 1964; and *CQWR*, March 4, 1966, 512; May 12, 1967, 803; May 9, 1969, 688; August 18, 1973, 2259; August 23, 1975, 1842; July 17, 1976, 1893; August 20, 1977, 1765. On clothing and jewelry, see *The Corpus Christi Caller*, June 15, 1960; *CQWR*, September 8, 1961, 1556; and Drew Pearson, November 16, 1967.

¹² *CQWR*, August 7, 1976, 2148. *The Times*, February 22, 2015.

¹³ *The Alexandria Daily Town Talk*, August 25, 1976. Hathorn, 345. Pettigrew, Owens, and Wanless' figures appear to be slightly in error, giving the exact same number of total votes cast as in the 1974 primary.

¹⁴ *Corsicana Daily Sun*, October 10, 1976. *The Eagle*, August 20, 1976. *The Mexia Daily News*, September 24, 1976. *CQWR*, October 9, 1976, 2856.

Obviously, before the leadership subsumed him, a primary interest was agriculture. Of his 125 introduced public bills, 16 were enacted. They addressed wheat, agricultural extension, crop allotments, Indians (three), the security of the Library of Congress, the president's pay, Mamie Eisenhower, the Francis Walter Dam, and local matters (six). Six of his 38 private bills were enacted. He introduced 219 resolutions, which places him only sixth in the Class per session, but 189 were enacted, more than twice that of the runner-up Olin Teague. These were overwhelmingly housekeeping measures salted with encomiums. On key votes Albert was with Democrats 446 times (187 with Northerners only, 90 with Southerners), Republicans six times, and missed 169 votes, primarily because the Speaker rarely votes. Despite this large number of misses, he was second in proportion to Glen Johnson. Although a pillar of the institution he did have two contrary votes. He opposed restricting Food for Peace from nations trading with North Vietnam and he supported moving the Maritime Administration into the Department of Transportation. In rated voting, Albert was in the middle of the Class's Border Democrats, a little less liberal than the most conservative of the Class's Northern Democrats, and a smidgen more liberal than the most liberal of the Class's Southern Democrats. In other words, he was central to the Democrat's disparate wings, an appropriate place for a leader of a big tent party.

Joe Evins came to be a dominant representative in public works. Chair of Small Business and patronage from the 88th Congress and of HUD and independent offices (including NASA and atomic energy) appropriations from the 89th and then public works appropriations from the 92nd, he achieved a pinnacle in the House before his failing health came to call. As a chair he was highly participatory with 1321 incidents on the floor and was focused. All fifteen enacted of his 308 introduced public bills were appropriations measures or local, three of the latter. All 37 enacted of his 103 introduced resolutions were committee-motivated or a eulogy, one of the latter. His five accepted out of eight offered floor amendments were not quite so constrained; two dealt with veterans. Of his 50 private bills, eight became law. Evins voted with Democrats 515 times (189 with only Southerners, 146 with Northerners), seven times with Republicans, and missed a huge 98 votes, partly due to illness. He contrarily opposed repeal of the oleo tax, banning military aid to Turkey, and the confirmation of Nelson Rockefeller as vice president. He was the fifth most liberal Southern Democrat in rated voting.

Robert Jones came to chair Public Works and Transportation only in his last congress, but was a subcommittee chair with that Committee since the 84th Congress. The Tennessee Valley Authority was his overweening concern, though he also was involved in atomic energy, flood control, roads, Appalachia, and water pollution. He introduced 272 public bills and twenty were enacted, addressing TVA (four), capitol-area public works (four), rivers and harbors (three), the District of Columbia, the executive protection service, roads, airports, Appalachia, war risk insurance, and local matters (three). His 18 accepted floor amendments out of 22 moved covered housing, soil conservation, atomic energy, reclamation, roads (three), presidential office space (two), flood control, the TVA, the Kennedy Center, water resources planning, Appalachia, water pollution (three), and deep-water ports. Except for the first two on this list, all related to his committee concerns. Even more so, four his six enacted resolutions, out of 41 introduced, were committee management matters, the other two being a eulogy and a concern for Thomasite teachers. His 751 floor participations give some measure of his criticality in committee work in comparison to Evins' count. Six of his 32 private bills were enacted. Jones voted 563 times with Democrats (211 with only Southerners, 154 with Northerners), nine times with Republicans, and missed 47 votes. He was contrary supporting Food for Peace for nations trading with North Vietnam and an independent Maritime Administration, and opposed the Surcharge-Spending Limitation Act and the Legislative Reform Act. He was the fourth most liberal Southern Democrat.

Otto Passman performed as both an opponent and facilitator of foreign aid for an amazing eleven congresses. His success in the House was partly due to his mastery of the minutiae of that aid. His Chair brought him respect as well as opprobrium, and many foreign junkets. Every one of his 21 enacted public bills out of only 111 introduced was a foreign aid appropriation. Much of his 585 floor participations were, as well, as were twelve of his 17 accepted floor amendments (out of 20 moved). The rest were about flood control (two), water lily removal, narcotics, and refugees. His one enacted resolution out of 48 introduced was a eulogy. Two of his eight private bills became law. Passman voted 495 times with Democrats (336 with only Southerners, 38 with Northerners), 64 times with Republicans, and missed 45 votes. Passman was contrary on an amazing 19 votes. He opposed the State Department information service, Interim Foreign Aid, the Marshall Plan, the Mutual Security program, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Peace Corps, the national highway program with new taxes, a plan to increase taxes and cut spending, the Tax Reform Act of 1969, a reduction in taxes, an increase in educational funding, the Legislative Reform Act, the presidential continuity amendment, and the impeachment of Nixon and supported military aid for Turkey, aid for Angolan rebels, Nixon's veto of the water pollution funds, the independence of the Postal Service, and limitations on the Equal Rights Amendment. In rated voting he was the ninth most conservative Southern Democrat.