

Chapter 43 – The End: The 1978 Election

The 1978 election was midterm of the first, and as it proved, the last presidential term of Democratic Pres. Jimmy Carter. Carter's opinion poll approval dropped to 39% in the summer but rose to 49% (versus 36% disapproval) in late October. At any rate, an analysis of 104 marginal congressional districts by ABC and the Harris Poll concluded that Carter "had no measurable influence [on the midterm vote] in the districts he visited."¹ The usual losses by the president's party of seats in the House of Representatives was low – fifteen compared to the results of the 1976 election. The Democratic Party retained a 277-158 majority in the House.

The losses were spread across the country, six in the North, four in the West, and five in the Census South. Four of the last were in the Confederate South and two were in Texas. Still, Democrats returned 20 of the 24 Texas representatives to the 96th Congress, including in the Ninth and Twelfth districts, but those two were not Omar Burleson and Olin Teague.

Burleson was the first to announce his retirement. On August 9, 1977, he let it be known that he would leave at the end of his term. His health was not known to be bad. The writers of *The Almanac of American Politics* would say he retired when he became eligible for the maximum congressional pension.²

Despite having missed much of the 95th Congress due to amputation of part of his left leg and several slight strokes, Teague did not announce his planned departure at the end of his term until December 20, 1977. The first member of the Class to become a member of the House on August 24, 1946, thanks to a special election to fill a vacancy, Teague was also the last to call it quits.³

Burleson remained publicly neutral in the primary to succeed himself, but Teague actively supported the candidacy of Chet Edwards, his District administrative assistant. In particular, Teague attacked the candidacy of Phil Gramm for the nomination in the six-person contest.⁴ Nevertheless, the 25-year-old Edwards came in third, and the very right-wing Gramm won the nomination and the election. Gramm would switch to the Republican Party in 1982 and become a Senator two years later. Edwards would be elected as a Democrat to the House in 1990. Burleson was succeeded by Democrat Charles Stenholm.

Thus ended the run of the Class of '46 in the United States House of Representatives after 30 years.

The Class produced two presidents, Democrat John Kennedy of Massachusetts and Republican Richard Nixon of California, one speaker of the House, Democrat Carl Albert of Oklahoma, five governors, Republicans John Davis Lodge of Connecticut, Charles Russell of Nevada, and Caleb Boggs of Delaware, and Democrats Thomas Stanley of Virginia and John Bell Williams of Mississippi, and nine senators, Democrats George Smathers of Florida, Kennedy, and John Carroll of Colorado, and Republicans Nixon, Charles Potter of Michigan, Norris Cotton of New Hampshire, Jacob Javits and Kenneth Keating of New York, and Boggs.

Nineteen members of the Class became chairs or ranking on committees or subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee (ordered by the congress of their first such achievement):

¹ Presidency.ucsby.edu. Charles Jones, 169.

² *The Hamlin Herald*, August 11, 1977. Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews (1979), 864.

³ *CQWR*, December 24, 1977, 2656. Melanie Watkins, "Teague, Olin Earl (Tiger)," tshaonline.org. Teague was not sworn in until the 80th Congress convened on January 3, 1947.

⁴ *The Hamlin Herald*, August 11, 1977. *The Eagle*, April 29, 1978. Segal.

- 81st Democrat Olin Teague of Texas, Chair of the Select Committee to Conduct a Study and Investigation of the Education, Training, and Loan Guaranty Programs of World War II Veterans, 83rd ranking then 84th Chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 93rd Chair of the Committee on Science and Astronautics then Science and Technology, 93rd Chair of the Democratic Caucus.
- 81st Democrat Prince Preston of Georgia, Chair of Special Committee to Attend World Assembly for Moral Rearmament, 84th Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of Commerce and Related Agencies.
- 83rd Democrat Omar Burleson of Texas, ranking then 84th Chair of the Committee on House Administration.
- 83rd Republican Charles Kersten of Wisconsin, Chair of the Select Committee to Investigate Incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into the USSR, renamed Select Committee on Communist Aggression.
- 84th Democrat Otto Passman of Louisiana, Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations.
- 84th Republican Thor Tollefson of Washington, ranking on the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.
- 84th Democrat Porter Hardy of Virginia, Chair of the Select Committee to Conduct Investigation and Study of Benefits for Survivors of Deceased Members and Former Members of the Armed Forces.
- 85th Republican Kenneth Keating of New York, ranking on the Committee on the Judiciary.
- 86th Republican William McCulloch of Ohio, ranking on the Committee on the Judiciary, 87th ranking on the Select Committee to Conduct a Study and Investigation of the Problems of Small Business.
- 86th Republican Carroll Kearns of Pennsylvania, ranking on the Committee on Education and Labor.
- 86th Republican Donald Jackson of California, ranking on the Committee on Un-American Activities.
- 88th Republican Walter Riehlman of New York, ranking on the Committee on Government Operations.
- 88th Democrat Joe Evins of Tennessee, Chair of the Select Committee on Small Business (which became a standing committee 94th), 88th Chair of the Speaker's Committee on Personnel, 89th Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Independent Offices and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 92nd Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Works.
- 89th Republican Paul Dague, ranking on the Committee on Agriculture.
- 89th Democrat Edward Garmatz of Maryland, Chair of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.
- 89th Republican Glenn Davis of Wisconsin, ranking on the Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, 93rd ranking on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, 93rd ranking on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Works.
- 92nd Democrat John Blatnik of Minnesota, Chair of the Committee on Public Works.
- 93rd Democrat Bryan Dorn of South Carolina, Chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

- 94th Democrat Robert Jones of Alabama, Chair of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation.

Achievement of such leadership positions is usually (except in the case of select committees and Appropriations subcommittees) a factor of longevity, of tenure, and 39 of the 109 members of the Class served a single term in the House. None of the Class would achieve the highest overall seniority in the House. Teague reached sixth and Burleson seventh. McCulloch made it to 27th, the highest of the Republicans in the Class, and he was fourth among just House Republicans. Glenn Davis remained later in the House than McCulloch, but due to his four-term hiatus managed only 78th.

An exception to the requirements of tenure was appointment to select committees and Appropriation subcommittees, which were largely at the pleasure of the House leadership or of committee chairs. Teague was appointed to Chair the Select Committee on World War II Veterans in September 1950 in his fourth year in the House, at which point he was fourth among Democrats on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Five of the nine members of the Select Committee were members of Veterans' Affairs, with Teague the most senior of the Democrats.

The Select Committee to Conduct a Study and Investigation of the Problems of Small Business was an exception to the irrelevance of tenure to chairing select committees. It was renewed every congress from 1941 to 1975, when it became a standing committee with an abbreviated name. Evins was appointed to the Committee in 1949 as the fourth Democrat of five and rose through biannual reappointment and tenure to become Chair in 1963.

Teague and Burleson were the first in the Class to reach chair or ranking status on a standing committee, both in 1953. Respectively on Veterans' Affairs and House Administration, both being minor committees, their rise was aided by attrition of more senior members, mostly through transfer to other committees. Burleson's initial appointment in 1947 placed him seventh among Democrats. The next month Minority Leader John McCormack transferred to Expenditures in the Executive Departments to attempt to constrain Republican plans for investigations of the Harry Truman Administration. The departure bumped Burleson up to sixth. In July Tom Pickett left House Administration for Public Works; so, by the end of his first term Burleson was fifth. Passman left the Committee for the exclusive Committee on Appropriations at the start of the 81st Congress, and Burleson was then fourth. Mary Norton retired from the House with the 1950 election, and Burr Harrison transferred to the exclusive Ways and Means Committee, moving Burleson up to second in 1951. Burleson began the 83rd Congress second to Thomas Stanley, but Stanley resigned from the House on February 3, 1953, to run for Governor of Virginia and, presto, Burleson was the ranking Democrat, becoming the Chair two years later when the Democrats took back the House. Burleson resigned the chair on July 30, 1968, to take a much lower position on the much higher Committee on Ways and Means.

By contrast, Robert Jones had a 28 year wait to become a committee chair. He was added to the Committee on Public Works late in the 80th Congress after the departure of Frank Boykin of Mobile for Merchant Marine and Fisheries created a vacancy, placing Jones eleventh. He moved up to ninth in the 81st Congress after two retirements and to eighth at the start of the 82nd after another retirement. Tom Pickett's transfer to Judiciary in August 1951 brought Jones to seventh. A retirement advanced him to sixth in the 83rd and another to fifth in the 84th. This slow but steady progress stalled for the next four congresses. Public Works was a pork barrel committee and most members found it good for their districts and good for their positions in the House to be able to send federal money to other members' districts; few members wanted off this committee. Finally, Chair Charles Buckley and another member failed of renomination in 1964 and Jones moved up to third in the 89th Congress. There he stayed for the next two

congresses. In 1970 George Fallon, who replaced Buckley as chair, also was ousted in a primary and Jones was second in the 92nd Congress. The new chair was Blatnik, a fellow member of the Class of '46 who was placed on Public Works the year before Jones. Blatnik held the position for two terms before retiring himself and the prize was Jones,' who stayed for only a single term before retiring himself at the age of 65, tired as much by the changing culture and rules of the House as by his age.

Nearly two-thirds of the Class of '46 were Republicans but they contributed less than half of the members who achieved the top position in their party in a committee or Appropriations subcommittee because they had a higher rate of attrition than the Democratic members of the Class.

Republicans left the House earlier, "fled" might be the appropriate word, as they were stuck in the minority for all but four years of the period from 1947 to 1978. While they hoped the 80th Congress was the dawn of a new era for Republican domination, it was obvious that the 83rd was an Eisenhower congress that would not endure.

The dark secret of the Democratic dominance of the House was the loyalty of its Southern wing, founded on white supremacy. Once sufficient racially conservative Democrats were replaced in the South by more liberal Democrats and racially conservative Republicans, the region flipped to a Republican majority in its House delegation in 1994, and the era of Republican supremacy of the House began.

McCulloch persisted in representation as long as he did, partly because of a partnership with Judiciary Chair Emanuel Celler that gave the Republican significant influence and partly because he carved out an important role for himself in equal rights legislation that brought not only personal satisfaction but wide recognition. Few Republicans in a Democratic congress could claim the same, and given the future shift of his Party to support of white supremacy, it is an irony.

ON BOARD S/Y CRISTINA June 24, 1971

Dear Congressman McCulloch –

I have just learned that you have announced your plans to retire from the House of Representatives.

Please let me take this occasion to tell you something that has been in my heart for many years.

I know that you, more than anyone, were responsible for the civil rights legislation of the 1960's, and particularly for the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

You made a personal commitment to President Kennedy in October 1963, against all the interests of your district.

When he was gone, your personal integrity and character were such that you held to that commitment despite enormous pressure and political temptations not to do so. There were so many opportunities to sabotage the bill, without appearing to do so, but you never took them. On the contrary, you brought everyone else along with you.

I think of President Kennedy's book, Profiles in Courage. You were a conservative Midwestern Republican from a farm district, who by seniority found yourself in a position where the civil rights problem was thrust upon you. Your integrity under such pressures is what makes our political system worth fighting for and dying for.

Please forgive the emotional tone of this letter – but I

want you to know how much your example means to me.
It is a light of hope in an often dark world, and one I
shall raise my children on as they grow older.

How truly fortunate was the Congress of the United States,
to have had your guidance for all these years. How they will
miss and need you.

And for my dear Jack, it is a precious thought to me
that in the last month of his life, when he had so many problems that
seemed insoluble, he had the shining gift of your nobility, to
give him the hope and faith he needed to carry on.

May I thank you with all my heart, and may God
bless you – Most Sincerely, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis⁵

Members of the Class of '46 who did not return to the House after 1978:

Omar Burleson's peak of influence in the House in his 16 terms was as the leader, but perhaps only nominally so, of conservative Democrats in league with Republicans. This does not show up in his key voting with Republicans, as he cast only 77 with Republicans and 571 with Democrats, but his voting was the most Southern Democrat of the Class; 417 of his Democratic votes were with Southerners alone (many of which were consistent with Republican voting), compared to 22 with Northerners. He missed only 20 votes. He was definitely conservative, tied for fifth most in rated voting among Southern Democrats. His one demonstrated passion was a revision of the Articles of War, which he tackled early with limited accomplishment in an effort to liberalize them. Many of his enactments relate to his chairing House Administration. Sixty-six were resolutions out of 134 introduced, and all but two private ones were House Administration concerns. Eight of his 317 public bills were enacted, dealing with state procedures on voting by veterans, Social Security, and six House Administration matters. He spoke 543 times on the floor and moved 20 amendments. Six were accepted covering Articles of War, temporary college housing, farm produce for foreign aid, aid to Yugoslavia, and funds for defense. Five of his 32 private bills were enacted. Burleson was contrary on key votes 17 times: He opposed an increase in the minimum wage (twice), the Colorado River project, the national highway program with new taxes, veterans pensions, the Trade Agreements Extension Act, the Peace Corps, an increase in educational funds, the Tax Reform Act of 1969, housing subsidies, funding emergency public service jobs and unemployment benefits, the Arab boycott, and lobbying disclosure, and supported moving the Maritime Administration into the Department of Transportation, limiting the Equal Rights Amendment, and military aid to Turkey and Angolan fighters.

Olin Teague was easily the most productive member of the Class of '46 in terms of enactments. Most of this was due to his lengthy chairship of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. He introduced 1878 public bills (second in the Class per session) and 159 were enacted, far outstripping Edward Garmatz in second place by 125%; another was vetoed. 128 were veterans bills, another six were NASA bills, six National Science Foundation, five District of Columbia – other committee obligations of the Representative. Others addressed the Battle Monuments Commission (three), the Standard Reference Data Act (two), the Reserve Officers Association, the Pacific War Memorial, military leave, environmental funds, the metric system, science and

⁵ Handwritten original on three pages, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of James F. Dicke, II.

technology policy, fire control, and local matters (two). Of 271 introduced resolutions, 83 were enacted, 60 veterans, 9 NASA and science, 11 in his role as Chair of the Democratic Caucus, also firefighters and fire academy, postmasters, united Ireland, and private. He spoke 1412 times on the floor and moved 54 amendments, 35 accepted, first among the Class. This addressed veterans (23), science (3), District of Columbia, Caucus concerns, the draft, universal military training, district offices, college funding, Agency for International Development, housing, and one local matter. Nine of 92 private bills became law. Teague voted 523 times with Democrats (345 with Southerners, 46 with Northerners), 50 times with Republicans, and missed 95 votes, largely due to ill health. Like Burleson he was contrary on 17 key votes. He opposed the Colorado River project, veterans pensions (yes), the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Trade Agreements Extension Act, the Peace Corps, the presidential continuity amendment, increased educational funds, the Tax Reform Act of 1969, the Legislative Reform Act, an increased minimum wage, the reprimand of Rep. Sikes, the Arab boycott, and lobbying disclosures, and supported moving the Maritime Administration into the Department of Transportation, military aid for Turkey and for Angolan fighters, and an independent Postal Service. His rated voting was on the conservative side of the Class Southern Democratic center.