

ORIGINS AND LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL
RESULTS OF THE SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE EIGHTIETH CONGRESS

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Thank
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INTRODUCTION

At the Democratic Convention in 1948, President Harry S. Truman announced to the partisan crowd that he was calling the Congress into special session. The purpose of this act, Truman said, was to give the Republican majority an opportunity to enact its platform. Truman's motivation for calling the special session was seriously questioned by Republicans at that time. It will be shown that the Republicans had reason to doubt the President.

Since the calling of the special session has been acclaimed as a brilliant political maneuver, many have claimed credit for the idea. The roles of key advisers will be examined and the man responsible will be identified.

An examination will be made of the legislative program which President Truman proposed for the special session. That program will then be compared to the Democrat and Republican platforms. This will be done to determine if Truman in actuality, asked the Congress to enact the Republican platform. The legislative results of the special session will be listed and examined. The legislative failures, which were far greater, will also be itemized. An assessment of the non-legislative results of the special session will be made and it will be shown that the special session was a significant factor in President Harry S. Truman's election.

CHAPTER I

On July 15, President Harry S. Truman strode to the podium at the Democratic National Convention which was meeting in Philadelphia. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when he began his acceptance speech. The speech, as acceptance speeches go, was noticeably short. It was a hard hitting speech. Truman told the audience,

Senator Barkley and I will win this election and make these Republicans like it, don't you forget that. We'll do that because they're wrong and we're right, and I'll prove it to you in just a few minutes.¹

He began to hammer almost immediately at the Eightieth Congress.

The Republican party favors the privileged few and not the common, every-day man. Ever since its inception, that party has been under the control of special privilege, and they concretely proved it in the Eightieth Congress. They proved it by the things they did to the people and not for them. They proved it by the things they failed to do.²

He pointed to specific legislation which the Congress had failed either to enact or enact to his satisfaction. Among his targets were the Republican failures to provide an increase in Social Security, establish health care, provide federal aid to education, ensure civil rights, and provide government assistance for housing. The Republicans had supported the Taft-Hartley Law but were criticized for their support.

¹Harry S. Truman, "For Victory and a Great Cause," Vital Speeches, XIV, No. 20 (1948), p. 610.

²Ibid.

He then analyzed the Republican party's platform. Truman pointed out, "they promised to do in that platform a lot of things I've been asking them to do, and that they've refused to do when they have had the power."³ He mentioned that though their platform cried about "cruelly high prices," they had failed to heed his call to do something about it. The same was true of slum clearance and low rental housing, equality of educational opportunity, and social security.

Having criticized the Republican party, Truman began to discuss one of his presidential duties. He simply stated that,

My duty as president requires that I use every means within my power to get the laws the people need on matters of such importance and urgency. I am therefore calling this Congress back into session on the 26th of July.

On the twenty-sixth day of July, which out in Missouri they called Turnip Day, I'm going to call that Congress back and I'm going to ask them to pass laws halting rising prices and to meet the housing crisis which they say they're for in their platform. At the same time I shall ask them to act on other vitally needed measures such as aid to education, which they say they're for; a national health program, civil-rights legislation, which they say they're for; an increase in the minimum wage--which I doubt very much they're for; an extension of social security and increased benefits, which they say they're for; funds for projects needed in our program to provide public power and cheap electricity I shall ask for adequate and decent law for displaced persons in place of the anti-Semitic, anit-Catholic law which the Eightieth Congress passed.⁴

The President left no doubt that the special session would be a vital issue in the campaign. "Now my friends, if there is any reality behind that Republican platform we ought to get some action out of the short session of the Eightieth Congress. They could

³Ibid., p. 611.

⁴Ibid., p. 612.

do this job in fifteen days if they wanted to do it."⁵ And finally, he placed the Republican party and the Eightieth Congress clearly on the spot.

Now what that worst Eightieth Congress does in its special session will be the test. The American people will not decide by listening to mere words or by reading a mere platform. They will decide on the record. The record as it has been written.⁶

When Truman finished, the lines of battle for the coming election had been drawn. The Democrats were going to make the Eightieth Congress the issue and, in case the public might have missed the point, the calling of the special session would make the issue crystal clear to the American electorate.

Although the decision to call the special session was probably reached quickly, the philosophical groundwork was being laid for many months. The first work began with a memorandum written by James H. Rowe, Jr., for Clark Clifford's consumption. The memorandum, dated December, 1946, was titled "Cooperation or Conflict."⁷ In it, Rowe, a friend of Clifford's, pointed out that twenty-seven times the various presidents had to deal with at least one house of Congress in the hands of the opposition party and ten presidents, including Truman, had both houses against them. He made the point that cooperation with Congress was not necessary to have a successful administration.

Cooperation with Congress, Rowe thought, was not only

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Memorandum, James H. Rowe, Jr., to Clark M. Clifford, December, 1946, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford.

unnecessary but impossible.

Also inherent in the nature of this Congressional functioning is the irresistible fact (when suggesting the substitution of bipartisan "cooperation" for constitutional government) that "you can't do business with Congress," or the Republican majority thereof. It has no parliamentary discipline.⁸

Rowe concluded that "He [Truman] should first of all accept the inevitability that formal cooperation is unworkable."⁹

It seems apparent that Rowe's late 1946 memorandum was important to Clark Clifford, Truman's most influential political advisor. In the fall of 1947, Clifford directed a forty-three page memorandum¹⁰ to Truman that outlined a daring political plan of action for the coming election. The memorandum was a detailed analysis of the contemporary American political scene. It forecast, quite accurately, major political events and outlined a course of action for the President to follow in his quest for re-election.

Early in the memoradum, Clifford set the tone for the entire paper by saying,

Comments that are presented here are based solely on an appraisal of the politically advantageous course to follow. In a democracy, action that is politically advisable may often accord with the merits of a particular policy. Sometimes it does not. It may generally be assumed that the policy that is politically wise is also the best policy for this country.¹¹

⁸Ibid., p. 6.

⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰Memorandum, Clark M. Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford.

¹¹Ibid., p. 1.

Under a list of the political probabilities for the coming year, Clifford predicted that Thomas Dewey would be the Republican nominee in 1948. The reason for Dewey's nomination was "that a strong candidate is required to defeat Truman."¹² Taft could not be elected because he had alienated too many American voters. However, Taft still had enough power to be a significant factor in the battle for the nomination and could throw his weight behind another candidate in case of a deadlock. But this was not a probability to Clifford. It was probable that Dewey would get the nomination "because of his 1944 experience and because of the extremely efficient group of men he has drawn around him, he will be a resourceful, intelligent and highly dangerous candidate, even more difficult to defeat than in 1944."¹³

In one instance, Clifford seriously misread the political climate. Truman would be elected if he could hold together the Democratic alliance of the South and West. It was not necessary, however, to be concerned about a Southern revolt. Nothing, he said, could cause the South to bolt and the only reason for conciliating the South was because of its congressional power and, because there was a Republican majority, he could see no reason for making concessions to the South.

The West and labor, however, were to be wooed at all costs because they would be the deciding forces in the coming election.

¹²Ibid., p. 2.

¹³Ibid., p. 3.

With the "solid" South and the West going for Truman, he would have 216 of the necessary 266 electoral votes. Fifty more votes could be picked up in the Midwest and "doubtful Eastern" states and Truman "could lose New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Massachusetts--all the 'big' states--and still win."¹⁴ The West, therefore was to be the "Number One Priority for the 1948 campaign."¹⁵

Henry Wallace would be a third party candidate, Clifford predicted. He believed that it would be necessary to both "dissuade him and to also identify and isolate him in the public mind with the Communists."¹⁶ According to Clifford, it was the Communists who would persuade Wallace to run and a Messianic belief in himself would allow him to be convinced of the necessity of his candidacy.

It was to be the independent and progressive voters who would be the deciding factors in the election of 1948 and Truman would have to make a concerted effort to capture their votes. Clifford believed that the independent voters who reacted to issues comprised a group that was larger than either the solidly Republican or solidly Democratic groups. Truman would, therefore, run a campaign based on issues in an attempt to capture the votes of the independent electorate.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 6.

The old line political machines, Clifford believed, had been replaced by pressure groups. These groups were farmers, labor, liberals, Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Italians, and other ethnic minorities. In his address to the special session of Congress, Truman would propose programs for each of these groups.

Clifford believed that as the campaign grew hotter, foreign policy would cease to be bipartisan. Relations with the USSR, the Marshall Plan, and aid to Greece would be the key issues in the arena of foreign affairs. Domestically, the key issues would be high prices and housing. Inflation, however, would be the more prominent of the two issues. Truman needed to submit a workable program for lowering prices to the Congress.

If the President recommends a bold program and the Congress refuses to go along with him, then we will be storing up valuable ammunition to use at a later time The manner in which the Administration dramatizes the high cost of living and the effectiveness with which it can present its story to the people can largely determine the next incumbent of the White House.¹⁷

Clifford believed that administration-congressional relations would worsen and cynically suggested how to politically make the best of the situation. He suggested that,

Insofar as it has control of the situation, the Administration should select the issues upon which there will be conflict with the majority in Congress. It can assume it will get no major part of its program approved. Its tactics must, therefore, be entirely different than if there were any real point to bargaining and compromise. Its recommendations--in the State of the Union Message and elsewhere--must be tailored for the voter, not the Congress-

¹⁷Ibid., p. 18.

man; they must display a label which reads "no compromises." The strategy on the Taft-Hartley Bill--refusal to bargain with the Republicans and to accept any compromises--paid big political dividends. That strategy should be expanded in the next session to include all the domestic issues.¹⁸

Clifford also contended that the President should state simply what he wanted the Congress to do. If the Congress provided any of the suggested legislation, Truman could take credit and if they failed to enact the call for legislation, he could label the Congress as "obstructionists."

The President would also need a "think group" to "co-ordinate the political program in and out of the Administration."¹⁹ This group would work under the auspices of the National Democratic Committee and feed the President ideas.

Near the end of the memorandum Clifford summed up:

The Campaign of 1948 will be a tough, bitterly fought struggle. The issues will be close and the ultimate determination of the winner may very well depend upon the type of staff work furnished to the two contenders.

No effort must be overlooked or left undone to furnish President Truman with the greatest possible assistance because the future of this country and the future of the world are linked inextricably with his re-election.²⁰

This brilliant analysis of the American political scene and the probabilities as they concerned the election of 1948 was a classic example of the end justifying the means. Clifford

¹⁸Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 40.

²⁰Ibid., p. 43.

called for no-compromise legislation which had no chance of passage. If Congress responded as Clifford believed, Truman could reap the political benefits for his stand on the issues and blame the Eightieth Congress for its failures. The strategy was to be politically successful.

The final memorandum which led to the calling of the special session was a memorandum found in both the Clifford and Samuel I. Rosenman papers at the Harry S. Truman Library. This was an unsigned memorandum titled, "Should the President call Congress back?" June 29, 1948.²¹ The document stated,

This election can only be won by bold and daring steps, calculated to reverse the powerful trend now running against us. The boldest and most popular step the President could possibly take would be to call a special session in Congress early in August.²²

This would "focus attention on the rotten record of the 80th Congress,"²³ force Dewey to defend that record, expose the conservative Republican Congressional leadership, split the Republican party on key issues and encourage the electorate to think of the President as a man of action fighting for their welfare on Capitol Hill.

There were some obvious dangers in the plan. The first was a Southern filibuster, but it actually would present no great obstacles. Truman could just threaten to cut Southern patronage

²¹Memorandum, "Should the President call Congress back?" June 29, 1948, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford.

²²Ibid., p. 1.

²³Ibid., p. 1.

or use the radio and explain his position to the American people and the Southerners would give in. Another danger was "In spite of the Martins, the Tabers, and the Wolcotts, Congress may pass some genuinely good legislation, for which Dewey and Warren could seize credit."²⁴ The authors of the memorandum were certain that the reactionary Republican leadership made this a remote possibility. But if a few pieces of important legislation were passed, it would be up to the Democratic publicity department to grasp the credit for Truman. The final danger was that poor legislation might be enacted for the purpose of fooling the electorate. This was not to be feared, according to the authors, because the Republican leadership was too tied to special interests to risk angering them by enacting legislation not in their welfare.

Although no factual basis exists to tie together the Rowe memorandum, the Clifford memorandum, and the memorandum titled "Should the President call Congress back?", their thematic affinity suggests a connection. When Rowe suggested that the President had more to gain from taking a nonconciliatory than a conciliatory stance toward Congress, he influenced Clifford. When Clifford suggested that the President call for legislation which had no chance of passage for purely political reasons, he was laying the ideological groundwork for the authors of "Should the President call Congress back?".

²⁴Ibid., p. 2.

These ideas must have influenced Truman when he called the special session. In his Memoirs he said, "Of course I knew that the special session would produce no results in the way of legislation."²⁵ The calling of the special session was a political act which had its roots deep in Administration strategy.

²⁵Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, Vol. II: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 208.

CHAPTER II

Historians have thought that the calling of the special session of the Eightieth Congress was to have a decisive effect on the outcome of the presidential election of 1948. Because it has been described as a brilliant political maneuver, several administration advisors have claimed, or been assigned, credit for the idea. This chapter will attempt to clear up some of the mystery by identifying those responsible for the calling of the special session.

Bernard Baruch is one administration advisor who attempted to take credit for the special session. John Franklin Carter, an administration speech writer and advisor, said, "Bernie Baruch told me that he had made that suggestion to Truman; there may have been others." Carter continues:

After the election I saw Baruch up in New York, and one of the things he told was that he had given Truman the advice to behave as he did at the Philadelphia convention and to wait out the then civil rights issue, and then to call Congress back into session. I'm sure there must have been others who made the same suggestion. But he did make it according to what he told me.¹

There are those who question Baruch's role as originator of the idea. Jules Abels, in Out of the Jaws of Victory, says

¹John Franklin Carter, Oral History Interview, October 7, 1966, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 7.

His biographer Margaret Coit, pictures Baruch giving the President advice to call the special session while Truman, pacing up and down, said, "You've got something there." This may be so--but it is more likely that the idea flowed so naturally from the President's artificial feud with Congress that he must be given credit as the author.²

Jonathan Daniels in response to a question from an interviewer concerning Baruch's role said,

Well, I am very fond of Mr. Baruch. I've known him since I was a child; but it's odd how almost anything that turned out to be good in the history of Democratic presidents, and some Republicans, in the writings of Mr. Baruch's friends and admirers, turns out to have been originally a Baruch suggestion.³

Judge Samuel I. Rosenman believes he originated the idea for the special session. His unauthenticated account is interesting.

Earlier in the pre-convention conferences, when I was alone with President Truman, after the Republicans had adopted that very liberal platform, we remarked how obvious it was that the platform was thoroughly hypocritical, for everybody knew that, if they were elected, they never intended to pass anything like the platform. I suggested to President Truman that it would make a great piece of news if he would announce in his acceptance speech that he was going to call the Congress back in special session, and suggest to them that if they would pass the platform that they had just written, he would be very happy to sign it.

Rosenman continued, "This was the subject of some discussion among the small group on the back balcony (Frank Walker, Clark Clifford, Matt Connelly, Abe Feinberg,

²Jules Abels, Out of the Jaws of Victory (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), p. 123.

³Jonathan Daniels, Oral History Interview, October 4 and 5, 1963, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 69.

Bob Hannegan, and Rosenman)."4

Rosenman concluded,

. . . the idea of calling the Congress into session and telling them to go ahead and pass the liberal platform was broached by me orally before June 29, 1948, the date of this memorandum.⁵ The memorandum expresses the same views I did personally and orally with the President. As I now read its language I would guess that it came from Clark Clifford, but that is a pure guess, . . .⁶

William L. Batt, Jr. has also been given credit for the idea of calling the special session. Irwin Ross, in The Loneliest Campaign, states positively that the idea was Batt's.⁷ In an interview, Batt expressed the conviction that he and his group of associates who composed the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee were the men responsible.

The President was getting smitten hip and thigh at this time by the 80th Congress. Then the Republican convention came along and passed a very pious platform

⁴All of the members of this back balcony group which began meeting in 1947 for the purposes of formulating strategy were either administration or Democratic party officials with the exception of Abe Feinberg, a New York businessman, who was a personal friend of Truman's.

Samuel I. Rosenman, Oral History Interview, October 15, 1968 and April 23, 1969, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 31.

⁵Unsigned memorandum found in the Rosenman and Clifford Papers in the Harry S. Truman Library and titled "Should the President call Congress back?".

⁶Rosenman, Interview, p. 31.

⁷Irwin Ross, The Loneliest Campaign (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 134.

advocating many of the things that Truman had advocated and all of which the Republicans in Congress had voted against, . . . We concluded that one way this could be dramatized would be for the President to call Congress back and then ask them to do what the Republican convention had endorsed So we went up that Wednesday night and I made the best case I felt I could make advocating the call back of the Congress to this little "Kitchen Cabinet" [Jack Ewing, Charles Brennan, Charles Murphy, Clark Clifford, George Elsey, David Bell, Leon Keyserling, David Morse, and Jebby Davidson]. I was voted down.⁸

But the idea did not die there. Batt's group, which included Kenneth Birkhead, Frank Kelly, Dr. Johannes Hoeber, David Lloyd, Phillip Dreyer, and John Barriere, persuaded him to try again to convince Clifford of the desirability of a special session.

. . . I went down and argued the case again with Clark and then heard no more of it until the President came up at two o'clock in the morning or whatever it was and announced the Turnip Day session in the convention. But Clark was far more receptive to the idea that next day than the group had been⁹

Even though the idea may have been a product of Batt's group, he believes it was Clifford who sold the idea to Truman and stated, ". . . I think Clark, undoubtedly was the guy who persuaded the President."¹⁰

Harry S. Truman, in his Memoirs, does not share the credit with anyone. No one is mentioned as having proposed the special session.

⁸William L. Batt, Jr., Oral History Interview, July 26, 1966, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 7.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

The Republican Convention, held before the Democratic convention, had adopted a platform calling for some of the measures asked of the Eightieth Congress. So in calling the "Turnip Day Special Session" [In Missouri there is a saying: on the twenty-sixth of July, sow turnips wet or dry.] for July 26, I suggested that they show good faith and implement their platform.¹¹

Jonathan Daniels, in response to an interviewer's question as to whom should receive credit for suggesting the special session, said, "It sounds like him [Truman] to me. I'm sure a lot of people will claim the credit for it, but that Turnip Day thing seemed to me a pretty good Trumanesque gesture."¹²

Who should receive credit for the idea of calling the Congress into special session? Clearly, the idea was in the air. Before the Republican Convention had met and adopted a platform, Helen Cahagan Douglas was suggesting a special session and William L. Batt, Jr. was counseling Clifford against it.¹³ It is, however, apparent that Clark Clifford, as Truman's closest political advisor, was influential in the calling of the special session.

Harry Truman, however, must receive credit for the calling of the special session. It was the type of gesture which only he could make effectively. Clark Clifford made the point

¹¹Harry S. Truman, Memiors, Vol. II: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 28.

¹²Daniels, Interview, p. 69.

¹³Telegram, William L. Batt, Jr. to Clark M. Clifford, undated, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford.

well when he wrote,

I believe the idea was an excellent one and the credit clearly belongs to President Truman.

I have read the attached memorandum ["Should the President call Congress back?"] with care and can shed no light on its authorship. I do not have any independent notes that would indicate definitely that it was mine. I doubt that anyone can be said to be the initiator of the idea of the special session. Numerous suggestions of this kind are always floating around a president and he picks those out that he likes and makes them his own.¹⁴

¹⁴Letter from Clark M. Clifford to Author, September 30, 1970.

CHAPTER III

In the interval between Harry S. Truman's speech to his Democratic colleagues at Philadelphia and his speech to the Congress at the opening of the special session, the Administration was active. In 1947, Truman had called a special session with disastrous results. The Administration was determined not to have this happen again. Therefore, considerable attention was devoted to the minutest detail. A legislative program, with Truman's Philadelphia speech in mind was formulated, Congressional strategy outlined, private support mustered, and, most importantly, a publicity program devised.

Suggestions for the legislative program came from several sources. Carl Hayden, the senator from Arizona, seems to have played an integral part in formulating the Administration's program. It was Hayden who suggested that the President, in his message to the Congress, should emphasize that he was not recalling Congress to deal with new legislation but rather legislation which had already received Congressional attention. The reason for this, he suggested, was that

Congress is looking for an excuse to say that the President has asked that more be done than could be done at this special session.

Therefore, in addressing Congress the President should not recite the many things that he has asked Congress to do in his various messages but emphasis should be placed on what Congress itself has started but failed to finish.

This can be accomplished by confining his remarks, except in a very few instances, to bills that have been introduced, or have had committee consideration, or have been favorably reported or have passed either the House or the Senate.¹

Hayden proceeded to outline a legislative program for Truman in which he specifically pinpointed desirable legislation. Using Truman's Philadelphia speech as a basis, he named the specific pieces of legislation which would satisfy the requirements of the program which Truman had outlined to the Democratic Convention. Besides naming legislation, Hayden discussed the action which had taken place on each of these pending pieces of legislation. Where a specific bill or resolution did not exist for Truman's purposes, Hayden still was able to make concrete suggestions. An example was the liberalization of the displaced persons law. Hayden said,

No bills have been introduced to amend Public Law 774, 80th Congress, approved under protest, June 25, 1948, but extensive hearings have been held on the entire subject so that there would appear to be no apparent need to consume time in taking further testimony.²

Senator Hayden also mentioned two topics which had not been voiced by Truman at the convention. It was Hayden who first recommended to Truman that he ask Congress to appropriate the funds needed for the building of United Nations headquarters. He also suggested to Truman that the Rivers bill, repealing the excise tax on oleomargarine, receive mention in the President's

¹Memorandum, Carl Hayden to Harry S. Truman, undated, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of George M. Elsey, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 6.

program. It did not.

Hayden even suggested the stance that Truman take when addressing the Congress.

The Chief Executive will be addressing an equal coordinate branch of the Government for whose power he has great respect. Consequently there must be nothing in his remarks which could possibly be construed as flippant or a reflection on the dignity of the Congress.³

It is significant that it was exactly this stance which President Truman took in his address.

A similar program was recommended to the President in an unsigned draft titled Proposed Legislative Program To Be Submitted To THE CONGRESS ON JULY 26, 1948. This draft also suggested that Truman use legislation already pending in Congress as the basis for his special session program. It was not as complete in recommending specific legislation as was the Hayden memorandum, however. Where an acceptable piece of legislation did not already exist, the draft would suggest a plan of attack. There were no suitable bills before Congress dealing with a national health program and it would be impossible for the Administration to draft such legislation in ten days.

Consequently, any recommendations made by the President for a comprehensive national health program should be couched in general terms. Under the circumstances, it is hardly realistic to hope for the Congress to pass a comprehensive health program at the short session.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Memorandum, unsigned, July 17, 1948, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Frederick J. Lawton, p. 3.

Under a broad civil rights program, the memorandum suggested action in several areas which Hayden had not mentioned. The memorandum suggested home rule and suffrage for the District of Columbia, statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, equalization of opportunities for residents of the United States to become citizens, and settlement of the evacuation claims by Japanese-Americans.

Whereas the Hayden memorandum and the unsigned memorandum were concerned primarily with the legislative goals for the special session, Max Lowenthal suggested a course of action with political results as the primary concern. Lowenthal, an attorney who never held an official position in the Truman Administration but was a close friend and political advisor of the President, believed the week before the special session was a "golden opportunity."⁵ The media were "thirsting for news"⁶ and the White House should move to fill the news vacuum. This was essential because the public had not grasped the meaning of the special session. He believed

Reiteration is necessary. Headlines day after day will do the job. If that job is done, then the idea behind this special session, the setting for this special session, the atmosphere in which this special session convenes, will be fixed right, just the way the President wants it.⁷

⁵Memorandum, Max Lowenthal, undated, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford, p. 1.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

Lowenthal then mapped out a strategy for getting the message to the people. He believed that seven news stories should be released in the seven days prior to the special session. Each of these seven stories should deal with a different, individual problem confronting the country and the Congress. The reason for spreading the stories over seven days was that "if all bills, all details, are dumped into the hopper in one day, the public cannot grasp it all. That is why the seven days before the special session can be used to distribute the load, to educate day by day."⁸

Lowenthal also believed there were several ways to disseminate the stories. The President could make announcements, his press secretary, Charles Ross, could hold conferences, or a Congressional leader could state "what the President told him."⁹ Lowenthal favored the first two approaches.

In line with Lowenthal's recommendations, Charles Ross began to meet daily with reporters and feed them key pieces of information. The first day, following Lowenthal's outline, he mainly discussed housing and the Taft-Ellender-Wagner housing bill. He also pointed out that the special session was merely a continuation of the Eightieth Congress and any legislative action already taken was still valid but would

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹Ibid.

not have been binding on the Eighty-First Congress.¹⁰

The next day in his discussion with reporters, Ross announced that the international wheat agreement and the loan for the building of the United Nations headquarters would be presented for Congressional approval. He also tantalized the reporters by telling them that Truman would probably address the special session but left open the possibility that he might have a clerk read his message to Congress instead of appearing in person.¹¹

The Administration continued to get page one coverage in the newspapers. On July 21, it was announced that Truman would, in fact, address Congress personally on July 27. It was also announced that he would ask Congress to deal with eleven or more major issues; one of which was a new displaced persons bill.¹² The next day Truman held a press conference and discussed various aspects of the coming special session.¹³ The last days before the special session began saw announcements being made concerning displaced persons legislation again, the restoration of \$56,000,000

¹⁰Anthony Leviero, "Truman Will Offer New Price Measure for Priority Action," New York Times, July 20, 1948, p. 1.

¹¹"President to Bid Rivals Hold to Bipartisan Foreign Policy," New York Times, July 21, 1948, p. 1.

¹²Anthony Leviero, "Truman to Deliver Congress Message in Person Tuesday," New York Times, July 22, 1948, p. 1.

¹³Anthony Leviero, "President Silent on Message Items," New York Times, July 23, 1948, p. 9.

for "river control, public power and reclamation projects," and the anti-inflation and housing programs.¹⁴ Judging from Charles Ross' actions in the week before the special session, Lowenthal's recommendations had not fallen on deaf ears.

William L. Batt, Jr. was also active prior to the special session. It was Batt's job to enlist the aid of private organizations in support of the Administration's legislative program. Pressure was brought to bear on Congress from all sides. Batt lined up support for the housing program from the National Public Housing Conference. He had Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannon contact all farm organizations for the purpose of demanding that Congress stay in session until the international wheat agreement was approved. Batt garnered support from the American Association of the United Nations for the purpose of building the United Nations headquarters.¹⁵

The American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association of Colored People were solidly behind the civil rights program while the National Education Association was taking action in support of the Administration's education

¹⁴Anthony Leviero, "Porter Will Lead President's Fight for Inflation Curb." New York Times, July 24, 1948, p. 1.

¹⁵Memorandum, William L. Batt, Jr. to Clark M. Clifford, July 28, 1948, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford, p. 1.

program.¹⁶

Batt even succeeded in getting the total support of some groups. The Americans for Democratic Action, the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the American Veterans Committee gave blanket support to the President's program.¹⁷ Philip Murray, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations even went on nationwide radio and discussed the Administration's program at great length.¹⁸

It will later be shown, in spite of this broad support, that little of this legislation was passed. To the Administration, this was unimportant. The importance lay in the publicity that the Administration was able to stir up because of this support.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Philip Murray, July 29, 1948, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark M. Clifford.

CHAPTER IV

On July 27, 1948, President Harry Truman addressed a joint session of Congress. The Congress had been recalled by Truman at a time when most Congressmen would have been kicking off their campaigns for re-election. The Republican majority in Congress and the Democratic President had grown increasingly disenchanted with each other and all pretensions of bipartisan cooperation had long since been stripped away. Many of the Southern Democrats present were appalled at Truman's advocacy of civil rights legislation and were bolting from the party. Other Democrats feared that Truman was a loser who, in his attempt to win election to the White House, would drag them down to defeat with him. On a recent swing to the West Coast, Truman had begun his attacks on the Republican Congress which on this day was his audience. It was not a friendly audience that the President faced and it would interrupt his speech only thirteen times with mild applause. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the speech which President Harry S. Truman gave to the special session of the Eightieth Congress and compare his legislative proposals with those in the Democratic and Republican party platforms. Particular attention will be paid to the Republican platform since it was the excuse for the calling of the special session.

Ostensibly, Truman was recalling Congress primarily to deal with the two major crises facing America in 1948: inflation and the housing shortage. Nearly half of his speech would be devoted to the subject of inflation and what Congress should do about it. It was such a serious problem, according to the President, that the security of the entire free world might be determined by what the Congress would do in the special session to deal with the problem. Truman even invoked the fear of Communism when he asserted that,

. . . world peace depends upon the strength of our economy.

The Communists, both here and abroad, are counting on our present prosperity turning into a depression. They do not believe that we can--or will--put the brake on high prices. They are counting on economic collapse in this country.¹

Truman recommended an eight point program to deal with inflation which was essentially the same one he had suggested in his State of the Union message in January. He believed the first step should be the invocation of an excess profits tax which would result in a fiscal surplus. The second point was to restore consumer credit controls. As a third step, he believed the powers of the Federal Reserve Board should be expanded so the Board could deal more effectively with inflationary bank credit. Fourth, he recommended that speculation on the commodity exchanges be regulated. As a fifth step, Truman suggested that scarce, essential industrial commodities be inventoried

¹U. S., Congress, House, Address of the President of the United States, House Document No. 734, 80th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 27, 1948, Congressional Record, XCIV, p. 9441.

and allocated to those areas where the need was greatest. Sixth, rent controls should be enforced and strengthened. The seventh step would be the rationing of a few vital products in short supply which affected the health and welfare of the people. Last should be price control of essential scarce commodities. As an adjunct to the last point, Truman stated, "The Government should have the authority, however, to limit wage adjustments which would force a break in a price ceiling, except where wage adjustments are essential to remedy hardship, to correct inequities, or to prevent an actual lowering of living standards."²

Truman next turned his attention to the second crisis: housing. Most Americans, he believed, could not afford either to buy or rent a home. He suggested, therefore, the adoption of the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill. The bill, which Robert Taft had repudiated, had passed the Senate on April 22, 1948 but was defeated in the House of Representatives. The Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill would have provided economic aid to cities for slum clearance and low rent housing projects. Aid would also go to the private home building industry and money would be granted for research to develop less expensive building techniques.

Truman proposed that Congress, while in special session, also give attention to less critical topics. He believed that this legislation could be easily enacted because it had already received study. The first piece of suggested legislation was

²Ibid.

federal aid to the states for education. Truman even pointed out the specific bill which he wanted enacted: Senate bill 472. It had passed the Senate on April 1, 1948, but had bogged down in the House of Representatives. To deal with the results of inflation on workers, the minimum wage needed to be raised from forty to at least seventy-five cents an hour. Again Truman pointed to a piece of specific legislation, Senate bill 2062, as being acceptable to him. Inflation was also ravaging those on social security. He, therefore, recommended a 50 percent increase in benefits, the lowering of the eligibility age for women from 65 to 60 years, and the extension of benefits to several million people not previously covered. Construction of electric power stations for rural America was called for--particularly a Tennessee Valley Authority plant at New Johnsonville, Tennessee. A more equitable pay scale was proposed for federal employees and, significantly, comprehensive civil rights legislation was advocated.

Truman next turned his attention to international affairs. The Displaced Persons Act needed to be amended to eliminate discriminatory provisions in immigration laws. Money needed to be appropriated to proceed with the building of the United Nations structure. Also, Truman proposed Senate approval of the international wheat agreement. It would guarantee an export market for the American wheat farmer.

All of the proposed legislation had already received the

close attention of Congress, and Truman suggested that Congress could enact the legislation with relatively little extra effort. Enactment of this volume of legislation by any Congress would have made it among the most productive in American history; to suggest it for a special session was almost ludicrous. But Truman was not through. He proceeded to recommend legislation of major importance for passage. He added that it was not necessary for the Eightieth Congress to enact the new legislation but the country could not wait past the Eighty-First Congress for its passage.

Truman then recommended: a health program based on national insurance, labor legislation to replace the Taft-Hartley law, a long range farm program, a reciprocal trade act, a universal training program, a national science foundation, new anti-trust legislation, and a St. Lawrence Seaway. No president could believe it possible for Congress to pass wide ranging legislation such as this in a matter of days. Harry Truman did not believe that the Eightieth Congress, of all Congresses, was capable of passing this program during a special session.³ The program was proposed for political, not legislative, results.

³Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, Vol. II: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 208.

Truman's proposed legislative program bears a remarkable resemblance to the Democrat party's platform. Virtually all of Truman's proposals were directly from the Democratic platform. The only exceptions were minor ones. The platform had said nothing about the ratification of the international wheat agreement or a universal training program. A slight difference occurred in another area. Truman wanted a national health program to be financed by insurance while the Democrats merely called for a program of "expanded medical research, medical education in hospitals and clinics."⁴

Truman had stated that the two prime reasons for calling the special session were to deal with inflation and the housing shortage. There was little in the Republican inflation plank which would have comforted him. The Republican plan of attack:

Progressive reduction of the cost of government through elimination of waste. Stimulation of production as the surest way to lower prices. Fiscal policies to provide increased incentives for production and thrift. A sound currency. Reduction of the public debt. We pledge further that in the management of our national government we shall achieve the abolition of overlapping, duplication, extravagance and excessive centralization. The more efficient assignment of functions within the government. And the rooting out of communism wherever found.⁵

The Republicans were reluctant to encourage the federal government to become too involved with housing. Private enterprise, they believed, should build and finance housing but

⁴Democratic Platform, Vital Speeches, XIV, No. 20, (August 1, 1948), p. 638.

⁵Republican Platform, Vital Speeches, XIV, No. 18, (July 1, 1948), p. 575.

government could encourage the building of less expensive homes. Federal aid to the states for the purposes of providing slum clearance and low rental housing should only be provided "where there is a need that cannot be met either by private enterprise or by the states and localities."⁵

There were other areas, however, where Truman would call for essentially the same type of legislation which the Republicans had announced for in their platform. Although they did not openly support the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Republicans favored a program of "sound rural electrification."⁷ They also believed that federal old age and survivors insurance benefits needed to be extended and increased. They did not call for specific legislation to raise civil service salaries but they did favor "a well paid and efficient Federal career service."

Living up to its heritage as the party of Lincoln, the Republicans adopted a broad and comprehensive civil rights platform. Anti-lynching legislation was to be a prime piece of the civil rights program. They proposed to abolish the poll tax. Their civil rights plank concluded:

This right of equal opportunity to work and advance in life should never be limited in any individual because

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 576.

of race, religion, color or country of origin. We favor the just enforcement of such Federal legislation as may be necessary to maintain this right at all times in every part of this Republic.⁹

It is popularly believed that President Harry S. Truman recalled the Republican Eightieth Congress to enact the Republican platform. This is a misconception. Truman called the session to deal especially with inflation and housing. Whereas he suggested government controls as a part of his anti-inflation program, the Republicans advocated the "stimulation of production as the surest way to lower prices."¹⁰ Truman believed the federal government should take the lead in providing low cost housing and slum clearance. The Republicans felt the federal government should become involved only when absolutely necessary.

Truman called for much legislation upon which the Republicans were silent. He called for federal aid to education. The Republicans did not mention it. The Republicans were reluctant to consider raising the minimum wage. A national health program based on insurance was not considered by the Republicans but they did say, "Government, . . . should take all needed steps to strengthen and develop public health".

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 575.

¹¹Ibid., p. 574.

They did not wish to replace the Taft-Hartley Act with new labor legislation nor did they envision a long range farm program, a reciprocal trade act, universal training, a national science foundation, or a St. Lawrence Seaway project.

In the area of foreign affairs, they were solid in their support of the United Nations but said nothing about loaning the United Nations the money it needed to build its headquarters in New York. They were satisfied with the Displaced Persons Act which the Eightieth Congress had enacted and said nothing about its revision. They were also mute on Senate approval of the International Wheat Agreement.

This examination of President Truman's speech to the special session of the Eightieth Congress and the platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties makes it apparent that the Congress was not recalled to enact the Republican party platform. It was essentially planks from the Democrat platform which Truman sought to have enacted. When William Batt, Jr., said the impetus for the calling of the special session was the adoption of a liberal platform by the Republicans, he was clouding the issue.¹² The Republican platform did not compare with the Democratic platform for liberality.

¹²William L. Batt, Jr., Oral History Interview, July 26, 1966, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 7.

CHAPTER V

On July 26, 1948, the Reverend Bernard Braskamp offered the following prayer for the Senate as the special session of the Eightieth Congress began:

O Thou God of infallible wisdom, we have entered upon days which are fraught with perplexing problems and heavy responsibilities, but also with glorious opportunities and possibilities.

We pray that we may have the interpreting light and the clear and confident leading of Thy Spirit in all our deliberations and decisions.

May the ideals and principles of our Blessed Lord not only stir our emotions but our wills, and may every lofty God inspired sentiment be translated into action and achievement.

Grant that it may be the goal of all our aspirations to glorify Thy great and holy name and to build Thy kingdom of peace and goodwill among men and nations.

Hear us for the sake of Christ.
Amen.¹

The special session was "fraught with perplexing problems and heavy responsibilities" but the "glorious opportunities and possibilities" failed to materialize and the "lofty God inspired" sentiments were translated into inaction and bickering.

Congressional reaction to being called back was generally critical. Many in the Republican majority believed it to be a politically motivated act that did not deserve the

¹U. S., Congress, Senate, Reverend Braskamp giving invocation, 80th Congress, 2nd Sess., July 26, 1948, Congressional Record, XCIV, p. 9353.

cooperation of the Congress. Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, a Michigan Republican, referred to the calling of the special session as "a last hysterical gasp of an expiring administration"² with partisan gains the motivating factor rather than a desire for legislation. Representative Hugh D. Scott, Jr., a Republican from Pennsylvania, believed the calling of the special session to be "the act of a desperate man who is willing to destroy the unity and dignity of his country and his Government in a time of world crisis to obtain partisan advantage after he himself has lost the confidence of the people."³

There were party contradictions in reaction to the special session. Representative Jacob K. Javits, a New York Republican, "welcomed the President's call for a special session."⁴ A Georgia Democrat, Walter F. George, believed the calling of the special session to be a politically damaging maneuver. He believed the special session would give the Republicans a chance to get off the political hook by passing legislation and therefore would "take away campaign ammunition from the Democrats."⁵

²W. H. Lawrence, "Truman's Call To Congress Held Campaign Challenge; His Aides Mapping Strategy," New York Times, July 16, 1948, p. 1.

³Clayton Knowles, "GOP Sees Politics in Congress Call," New York Times, July 16, 1948, p. 3.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

The fate of the Administration's legislative program for the special session was probably sealed when the New York Times revealed that

Within seven hours after President Truman delivered his message today to the Congress he had called back to work on a multi-point plan for legislative action on inflation, housing, educational facilities and other matters, almost the whole of his program was thrown back into his face by the Congressional Republican high command.

This group served official notice that it would adjourn the new session 'as soon as possible' after considering anti-inflation and anti-poll tax legislation. It gave no promise as to decisive action on either measure.⁶

It will be the purpose of this chapter to examine the legislative achievements of the special session. Members of Congress during the special session not only had to deal with the hundreds of bills already introduced in the second session of the 80th Congress but also had to deal with many new ones which were introduced in each house. Forty-seven new bills were introduced in the Senate and 126 were introduced in the House. Among these bills were the usual private bills which are often introduced for the consideration of the Congress. Private bills accounted for nearly half of the bills introduced in the Senate and one-third of those introduced in the House.⁷ None passed.⁸

⁶C. P. Trussell, "Truman Asks Curbs On Inflation; Seeks Profits Tax, Housing Law; GOP Balks, Plans Short Session," New York Times, July 28, 1948, p. 1.

⁷Congressional Index, 80th Congress, 1947-1948, pp. 963-965 and 3668-3674.

⁸U. S., Congress, 80th Congress, 2nd Sess., July 26, 1948 to August 7, 1948, Congressional Record Daily Digest, pp. D518-534.

Legislation which the President had called for was also prominent among new bills. In the House, five displaced persons bills, three federal aid to education bills, four anti-inflation bills, two housing bills, three social security bills, and three veteran's housing bills were introduced. The Senate had three displaced persons bills, one federal aid to education bill, two anti-inflation bills, two social security bills, and two veteran's housing bills introduced during the same period.⁹

None of the bills introduced during the special session became law. Many of the bills had obvious merit but died in committee. Some bills had little in them which required the consideration of a special session of Congress. H. R. 7048, which was introduced by John McCormack, provided for the coinage of a seven cent piece.¹⁰ H. R. 7099 dealt with marital breach of promise actions in the District of Columbia.¹¹ H. R. 7131 proposed the exemption of billiard and pool tables, when used by organizations of war veterans, from a tax usually imposed on such tables.¹²

Major pieces of legislation rarely made it out of committee. The one piece of legislation that received a

⁹Congressional Index, pp. 963-965 and 3668-3674.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3668.

¹¹Ibid., p. 3670.

¹²Ibid., p. 3672.

considerable amount of Senatorial discussion was H. R. 29, the anti-poll tax bill. The bill was debated for five days in the Senate. In reality it was a filibuster rather than a debate. The bill finally died on August 4. The filibuster was directed against the motion to consider debate rather than the bill itself. Therefore, the cloture motion to end the filibuster could not be voted upon.¹³ Ironically, it was a Republican, Kenneth S. Wherry of Nebraska, who led the fight for the measure. He was chiefly opposed by two Democrats: Tom Stewart of Tennessee and Burnett Maybank of South Carolina.

A bill that received a considerable amount of committee attention was the amended displaced persons act. The Senate committee on the Judiciary had lengthy hearings on this subject from the first of the special session to the last and yet never reported the bill out of committee.¹⁴

Several bills did receive legislative approval during the special session. On August 3, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs met in executive session and reported out S.J. Res. 212, a loan for the building of the United Nations headquarters in New York City.¹⁵ On August 5, the House, by voice vote, passed the bill and sent it to the President for his approval. The bill provided for an interest free loan

¹³Congressional Record Daily Digest, p. D526.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. D518-534.

¹⁵Ibid., p. D526.

to the United Nations, with repayment being in thirty-one annual payments beginning July 1, 1951.¹⁶

As is traditional, there was a flurry of activity on the last day of the special session, August 7th. The House passed, by a vote of 351 to 9, H. R. 709, which concurred with the Senate's amendment of H. R. 6959 which had previously passed the House.¹⁷ The legislation, in final form, was primarily the creation of Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Wisconsin Republican, whose greatest source of opposition came from a Republican, Senator Charles W. Tobey of New Hampshire. The legislation provided for a \$35,000,000 increase in the fund used for guaranteeing loans on housing costing under \$4,500. It also provided for guarantees of up to ninety-five percent for loans on housing costing less than \$6,000. It guaranteed, to veterans living in cooperative housing projects, up to ninety-five percent of the amount of their loans. Large scale rental housing projects could receive loans of up to ninety percent if the individual units did not cost more than \$8,100. A new unit was created in the Housing and Home Finance Agency to try to standardize building material measurements. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation also had its secondary markets for housing loans expanded. The last provision liberalized

¹⁶Ibid., p. D529.

¹⁷U. S., Congress, House, 80th Congress, 2nd Sess., August 7, 1948, Congressional Record, XCIV, p. 10219.

lending to pre-fabricated housing manufacturers.¹⁸

On the last day, the Senate passed, by voice vote, the Inflation Control bill. The bill extended consumer installment credit until July 1, 1949 and increased the reserve on demand deposits of banks in the Federal Reserve System by four percentage points. It also increased by one and one-half points the reserve required against time deposits for a period ending July 1, 1949.¹⁹

Minor pieces of legislation which were passed were H. R. 715 and H. J. R. 445. H. R. 715 provided monies for "additional mileage of Members of the House, Delegates of Territories, and Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico"²⁰ and also allotted \$2,000 to a representative who had incurred extra expenses in a contested election. H. J. R. 445 was simply the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1949. It provided extra funds to a number of government offices. Specifically, it appropriated \$2,400,000 to the Housing and Home Finance Agency for operating expenses, \$10,000,000 to the Federal Housing Authority for the housing insurance investment fund and the Veterans Administration received \$5,000,000 for cars and "other conveyances" for disabled veterans.²¹

¹⁸Congressional Record Daily Digest, p. D534.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

H. J. R. 445 also gave the Displaced Persons Commission permission to appropriate their funds of \$2,000,000 in the first nine months of fiscal 1949. It raised the amount allocated for administrative expenses in the Office of the Administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency \$300,000. That money apparently was taken from administrative expenses of the Federal Housing Administration. The last provision extended from six to nine months, a commission created by public law 880. The Commission was created for the purpose of determining claims of certain motor carriers.²²

On August 12, 1948, the Administration issued a "Box Score"²³ on the reaction of Congress to the President's legislative program. The "Box Score" was divided into major recommendations. Under major recommendations were the anti-inflation program and the housing program. The Administration listed in some detail what had happened to specific parts of the legislative program. Under the anti-inflation program, the excess profits tax was virtually ignored. The Ways and Means Committee did not hold a meeting during the special session. Consumer Credit Controls were passed but would only be effective until July 1, 1949. No regulations were placed on commodities speculation, part of the Administration's program. Congress failed to provide the Administration the authority to institute allocation and

²²Ibid.

²³"Truman's Box Score," New York Times, August 13, 1948, p. 8.

inventory controls. Rent controls were not strengthened nor was the authority to ration provided. Congress disregarded price controls. A housing bill was passed, of course, but not the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill which the Administration wanted. Under other recommendations, the House Education Committee did not meet to consider the Administration's education proposal. No committee meetings were held to consider increasing the minimum wage, increasing Social Security benefits, or instituting reforms in Federal pay scales. No Congressional activity was taken to amend the Displaced Persons Act or to restore appropriations for power projects. The international wheat agreement was reported by committee but failed in ratification by the Senate. And, as previously mentioned, the only part of the civil rights program to receive attention was the anti-poll tax bill and it was filibustered to death. Legislatively, the special session was a failure.

But a development occurred during a committee meeting which would be of far greater significance than any of the legislation that was passed. On August 3, Whitaker Chambers, testifying before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, stated that Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, was a member of a Communist underground group.²⁴

²⁴Congressional Record Daily Digest, p., D526.

This testimony would set off a frenzied search for Communists in many sectors of American society that would not run its course for several years.

CHAPTER VI

The special session was an issue in the presidential election of 1948. The Administration made it an issue and President Truman kept the issue alive throughout the campaign. As mentioned earlier, the Administration had issued a "score card" at the end of the session for the purpose of demonstrating to the public that nothing had been accomplished by the Republican Congress during the special session. On August 12th, 1948, Truman held a news conference and, predictably, the first question called for his "observations" on the record of the special session. He replied,

Well, my observations are that it was a kind of poor result that we got. I think more action could very well have been taken. There were instances when committees refused even to meet to hear the Administration's views on which we asked them to act. On those things that they did act upon, it didn't take them very long . . . I think they could have taken a great many more actions, very easily, and in just as short a time, if they had been so inclined.¹

A reporter then supplied Truman with a convenient name for the 80th Congress. He asked: "Would you say it was a 'do-nothing' session, Mr. President?" Truman replied: "I would say it was

¹U. S., President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1953 -), Harry S. Truman, 1948, p. 173.

entirely a 'do-nothing' session. I think that's a good name for the 80th Congress."²

Early in the campaign, Truman began to make the special session an issue. He skillfully pointed to those two key issues which were affecting almost everyone, housing and inflation, and put the blame for the situation squarely on the shoulders of the Republican Congress. In Denver he pointed out that

The Republican stand on housing was clearly exposed last July, when I called the Congress into special session and demanded again that they enact housing legislation. The bill was ready. It had been studied and discussed, times without number. It was supposed to be nonpartisan.

. . . The Republican leadership in the House of Representatives cracked the whip. And the Republican Senate killed the nonpartisan housing bill.³

Truman blamed "special interests" for the actions of the Republican Congress.

Typically, Truman then attacked high prices and Congressional insensitivity to them. "When I called the Republican Congress into special session this year and asked them for price control measures, they said that my request was made for political purposes. They used that as an excuse and did nothing about prices."⁴ He then pointed out to his audience that if

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 517.

⁴Ibid.

Congress had acted, prices on basic items such as "meat, milk, steel, and automobiles would have been stabilized or reduced."⁵

This was the format which Truman often relied upon. In Los Angeles, he attacked the failure of the Republican Dominated Congress to enact comprehensive housing legislation. Again he blamed the Republicans for acquiescing to the pleas of special interests. In a radio speech for Democratic Women's Day, Truman reminded housewives that "Day after day, when you do your marketing, you must face the soaring prices the 80th Congress has forced upon you."⁶ The special session had been provided by Truman so the Congress could deal with the problem.

I called a special session of Congress . . . and urged it to . . . do something to keep down the cost of living.

. The Republican 80th Congress turned me down, and it turned you down.

In two instances the failure of the Congress to enact the Republican platform was attacked.

That Republican outfit went to Philadelphia and wrote a platform, and that platform was the most hypocritical document that was ever written; and I called them back to Washington to see whether they meant what they said in their platform. And they didn't.⁸

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 580.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 841.

The "do-nothing 80th Congress" was one of the key issues in the Presidential campaign of 1948 and the lack of accomplishments at the special session gave Harry S. Truman further ammunition with which to attack.

CHAPTER VII

When President Harry S. Truman called the 80th Congress into special session in the summer of 1948, he did so in an attempt to win votes. He was elected and, obviously, many factors contributed to his election. The significance of any one political act is difficult to assess but this chapter will demonstrate that as a vote getting maneuver, the calling of the special session was successful.

Several extensive analyses have been written about the election of 1948. They are: Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign;¹ The Pre-Election Polls of 1948;² and In Your Opinion.³ Voting is the famous Elmira, New York, study of political behavior in the 1948 election. Pre-Election Polls is the result of a study undertaken by the Social Science Research Council in an attempt to determine why the polls were wrong in their predictions in 1948. In Your Opinion is basically a personal view of politics from the year 1945 to 1960 by a Gallup Poll editor.

¹Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

²Frederick Mosteller, et al., The Pre-Election Polls of 1948 (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1949).

³John M. Fenton, In Your Opinion (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960).

Voting provides some valuable insights into what motivates voters.

Since partisanship increases political interest, anything that weakens partisan feelings decreases interest. Such is the effect of attitudinal "cross pressures": people whose attitudes on specific issues are consistent with their vote intention have greater interest than those whose specific attitudes do not correspond with their vote intention The "watering-down" of partisanship lowers the respondent's degree of interest; why remain so interested when there is some right on both sides anyway and hence less reason for investment in the outcome? A situation in black and white generates more interest than one in gray. And vice versa: the less interest, the less partisanship.⁴

If a political figure could create partisan interest then it could be of significance in his campaign. In 1948, approximately five million more voters called themselves Democrats than Republicans.⁵ If Truman were able to arouse his party (or partisans) he would be able to recapture the Presidency.

One part of the Elmira study surveyed the interest level of the participants. Of the group whose interest level changes during the campaign, there was a nine percent greater increase during the months from June to August than from August to October, when a campaign supposedly heats up. Of course, the conventions were held during this time but

⁴Berelson, Voting, p. 27.

⁵Fenton, Opinion, p. 63.

Other significant political events were noticeably absent-- except for the special session.⁶

As previously shown, Truman made full use of the lull which occurred before the special session began. Daily announcements were made to the press and Truman and his positions on the issues of the day dominated the news. Truman was making news and creating partisanship as a result. "The more that people read about and listen to the campaign on the mass media, the more interested they become in the election and the more strongly they come to feel about their candidate."⁷

The issues at the special session were also to become the key issues in the campaign. More than one source has concluded that these issues were the forces that turned the election to Truman. ". . . it seems clear that an impending defeat for the Democratic party was staved off by a refocusing of attention on the socioeconomic concerns which had originally played such a large role in building that party's majority in the 1930's."⁸

John Fenton reaches much the same conclusion in In Your Opinion.

The 1948 election can also be called a victory for Roosevelt--convincing evidence of the "almost Fanatically" loyal support built up by FDR. When millions of voters came to the conclusion that neither Truman nor Dewey had

⁶Berelson, Voting, p. 29.

⁷Ibid., p. 246.

⁸Ibid., p. 270.

the qualities of leadership they were looking for, they either stayed away from the voting booth (the 1948 turnout was lower than in any other Presidential election in twenty years) or returned to voting habits built up during 1932 through 1944.⁹

Certain questions on Roper's Surveys 2, 3, and 4 dealt with the opinions of respondents who were asked questions that were "socioeconomic." The questions were also, in a somewhat altered form, issues at the special session. Eighty-five point four percent of the Truman supporters and 75.8 percent of the Undecided agreed with this statement: "The best way to stop inflation is to put back some price controls." Fifty-five point eight percent of the Dewey supporters even agreed!¹⁰

The respondents were given three choices on how to best deal with the housing situation. Listed are their

responses.	Dewey Supporters	Percent Undecided	Truman Supporters
Let it work out naturally without the government doing anything about it.	31.5	25.6	16.1
Try to get more low cost housing by having the government help finance the home building industry.	44.4	34.8	44.1
Have the Government itself start building low cost houses.	21.5	37.6	38.8
None of them (volunteered).	2.6	2.0	1.1

⁹Fenton, Opinion, p. 62.

¹⁰Mosteller, Pre-Election Polls, p. 271.

The majority in all three groups favored federal involvement to deal with the housing crisis.¹¹

A setback for the Administration was recorded when a question concerning Fair Employment practices was asked. The question was: "What would you like to see done about legislation that prohibits employers--when they are hiring people--from turning them down solely because of their race or religion?" The responses showed why Strom Thurmond was able to organize the Dixiecrat revolt.

	Dewey Supporters	Percent Undecided	Truman Supporters
Would like to see laws passed by Congress to do this.	22.0	28.6	33.5
Would like to see it left up to each state to pass their own laws if they want them.	32.1	30.3	30.9
Would be better not to have any laws at all of this kind and work it out some other way.	45.8	41.1	35.7 ¹²

A definite socioeconomic question and its responses was,

Over the course of the years, a number of measures have been taken by the government to improve the conditions of the poor people. Generally speaking, do you think the government should do more to improve the conditions of the poor people or that the government is doing just about the right amount of things now, or that the government has already done more for the poor people than is good for them?

¹¹Ibid., p. 272.

¹²Ibid.

The responses were:

	Dewey Supporters	Percent Undecided	Truman Supporters
Should do more.	38.6	54.1	55.9
Right amount now.	40.7	35.4	36.1
Done more than good for them.	20.7	10.5	8.0 ¹³

The Congress and Truman's calling of the special session became important issues in their own right. When given an opportunity to rank the performance of the 80th Congress, over 55 percent of the Truman supporters and the Undecided either ranked it "pretty bad" or "about the worst one this country has ever had."¹⁴

Truman's motivation for calling the special session was given a positive rating.

	Dewey Supporters	Percent Undecided	Truman Supporters
Truman called Congress because he sincerely believes these are important times and Congress has business to finish.	14.8	33.5	53.8
Truman's main reason for calling Congress Back was to clear up some important business, although he probably hopes to help his own election too.	28.9	34.4	32.1

¹³Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 270.

	Dewey Supporters	Percent Undecided	Truman Supporters
Truman might want to get some work done in this emergency session, but his chief reason for calling Congress back was political.	34.6	19.5	11.3
It was nothing but a cheap political trick on Truman's part to call Congress back.	21.7	12.5	2.8 ¹⁵

In almost every instance the issues at the special session were ones on which Truman Supporters and Undecided respondents agreed with the President. These were partisan issues that increased partisan feelings. Truman had to benefit from his stands on these issues since there were approximately five million more Democrats than Republicans and almost half as many Undecided respondents as Republicans.

The Elmira Study indicated that this was the case. "His [Truman's] support came from voters with a Democratic voting history, or at least a non-Republican history. The campaign trends, then, were less of a conversion than a rally."¹⁶ This rally by the Democrats back to the party of Roosevelt was partly a result of the special session. R. Alton Lee, writing in the Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, said,

The political tactic of calling the special session of Congress enabled Truman to set the tone for the election of 1948, to dramatize the issues he wanted to campaign

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁶ Berelson, Voting, p. 254.

on, and to create a sounding board for his speeches. Bringing his facts to the people, he was able to reverse the conservative political trend and maintain his party in power an additional four years . . . The special session helped Truman to present his domestic program to the nation in a dramatic way.¹⁷

George Elsey, a close Presidential adviser, also believed that the special session had been important.

. . . the President had succeeded in putting the Republicans on the defensive. He had succeeded in driving Governor Dewey and Governor Warren into the position of defending the Republican Congress and explaining why it hadn't done better. This was a major reversal. It is usually the party in power that is on the defensive.

The second important effect of the special session was to show that Governor Dewey was not actually the leader of the Republicans in Congress . . .

The third effect of the special session was to dramatize the clash between President Truman and Congress. From that time on, the campaign was a good slugging match and became a contest which captured the imagination of the country.

You can better understand now what I mean when I say a campaign is like an iceberg. By the time it officially opens all the issues have been drawn. That was true of the 1948 campaign. By the time it opened interest had been aroused. Labor, farmers, and other pressure groups were aroused, and had taken sides, President Truman's stock was on the upswing.¹⁸

The calling of the special session, then, had created partisanship. Truman was able to reap the benefits of the partisan feelings that were aroused. It is impossible to

¹⁷R. Alton Lee, "The Turnip Session of the Do-Nothing Congress: Presidential Campaign Strategy," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, XLIV, No. 3, (December, 1963), p. 266.

¹⁸Speech, George M. Elsey, January 11, 1949, p. 4. Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of George M. Elsey.

quantify the effect of the special session on the election results of 1948, but its effect was significant.

CHAPTER VIII

When President Harry S. Truman called the 80th Congress into special session in 1948, he was performing in a manner consistent with an Administration policy which had been being formulated since 1946. Essentially the philosophy was that little could be attained by cooperating with Congress but much could be gained by using the breach between Congress and the President for political advantage and thus help return Truman to the Presidency. It would take bold steps to regain the Presidency and the calling of the special session was a politically motivated first step in one of the most dramatic campaigns in American History.

Although many have claimed credit for the idea behind the calling of the special session, Harry S. Truman ultimately had to make the idea his own. The idea was in the air and the subject received much discussion. We may never know who first thought of the special session but we do know that it was Truman who made the idea effective.

The Administration managed to gain one of its goals for the special session: the attainment of publicity. By making use of a carefully formulated plan, the Administration was able to capture headlines almost daily before the special session convened. Publicity is a key factor in any campaign

and this campaign was no exception.

A misconception concerning the special session of the 80th Congress is that Truman called the Congress back to enact the Republican platform. A plank by plank analysis demonstrates that it was essentially the Democratic platform that Congress was asked to enact. Truman would, however, tell the public that he had asked for enactment of the Republican platform.

The legislative results of the special session were negligible. Not one significant piece of legislation was enacted. Several minor pieces of legislation resulted but the Congress almost totally ignored the key issues of that time. During the campaign, Truman would often refer to the legislative failures of the Republican dominated special session. He made those failures issues in his successful campaign.

As a vote getter, the calling of the special session was successful. An analysis of voter attitude surveys demonstrates that the special session created partisanship among the voting public. By this bold political act, Truman was able to recapture the allegiance of the more numerous Democrat voters and thus gain election.

The calling of the special session was a brilliant political maneuver which was done almost entirely for political gain. Legislatively, nothing was accomplished. Politically, the benefits were great.

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