

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.
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CASE HISTORY ON A CONGRESSIONAL MISTAKE.

Now and then Congress can go on an emotional binge and deal with a collateral issue rather than with the real thing. Such seemed to be the case when on March 12th, the House passed the Debt Limit Bill to which was attached an amendment dealing with ceilings placed on salaries by Executive Order.

PRESIDENT HURLS A CHALLENGE.

In early September 1942, the President directed a message to Congress expressing his anxiety over inflation and rising prices and wages and insisted that Congress take action. At the same time, he addressed a radio chat to the nation in which he expressed the same concern and said in effect that if Congress failed to act, he would.

CONGRESS ACTS.

Congress got busy at once. The fruit of it's labors was a series of amendments to the Emergency Price Control Act which authorized and directed the President to issue a general order stabilizing prices, wages and salaries on a basis of price, wage and salary levels which existed on September 15, 1942. This act also gave the President authority to make such adjustments as would correct gross inequities which might exist or which might arise.

THE PRESIDENT ACTS AGAIN.

Immediately after the enactment of this legislation, the President issued an Executive Order stabilizing prices, wages and salaries. A ceiling was set on salaries so that after allowance for insurance, income taxes and other charges, net salary should in no case exceed \$25,000 per year. This order at once evoked a storm of protest. A variety of reasons was launched against this portion of the stabilizing order. Principal contention made was that the President had no such authority under the Act which became law on October 2nd and that the President was clearly usurping the functions of Congress.

A CAMPAIGN BEGINS.

In a little while, a campaign was launched to challenge the President's authority to issue such an order. There were editorials and radio speeches. There were legal briefs and pamphlets. There were brochures and circulars. In Congress, the issue was freely ventilated. It provoked considerable fervor.

IT'S CONGRESS' - TURN.

On March 11th, there came before the House, a bill to increase the debt limit to 210 billion dollars. To this bill, the Ways and Means Committee of the House had reported an amendment known as the Disney amendment. It did not change the language of the Act of October 2, 1942 upon which the President relied for authority to fix salary ceilings at \$25,000. It merely provided that any action taken under that act by the President should not operate to reduce salaries below what they were on Dec. 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbor Day) or prevent salaries from rising to \$67,200, whichever was the greater. While the bill was being considered, an amendment was offered by Mr. Gearhart of Calif. It recited that no law now on the books should be deemed to authorize a salary limitation. Next came an amendment by Mr. Smith of Va. which had the effect of establishing one standard for wages and another for salaries. Finally, came an amendment by Mr. Wolcott of Michigan, which repealed that proviso in the law on which the President relied for his authority, rescinded that part of the Executive Order relating to salary ceilings and made it necessary for the President to re-submit the matter to Congress for the proper authority.

HOUSE ACTION.

The House defeated the proposals offered by Mr. Gearhart, Mr. Smith and Mr. Wolcott and then passed the proposal suggested by Mr. Disney.

ANALYSIS.

The Disney proposal instead of meeting the real issue between the President and the Congress, left the original law intact and merely took the lid from salaries but left it on wages. The Gearhart proposal also failed to meet the real issue and would have the effect of stabilizing wages and salaries at the lowest rather than the highest levels which existed before September 15, 1942. The Smith amendment would have established one standard for wages and another standard for salaries. The Wolcott amendment on the other hand dealt directly and simply with the real issue. It left the entire stabilization program intact and merely repealed the proviso in existing law on which the President depended for his authority and said in effect that to clarify the matter, he must re-submit it to Congress for proper authority. This was the only logical course to pursue.

The bill went to the Senate. It was referred to the Senate Finance Committee and by a unanimous vote, that Committee very realistically and very properly amended the bill by substituting the language of the Wolcott amendment for the Disney proposal. Here then is a brief case history of a bit of legislative emotionalism. (Note: The author of the Congressional Front voted against the Disney, Gearhart and Smith proposals, supported the Wolcott amendment and finally voted against the bill when the Wolcott amendment was not adopted.)