

Phil Gramm

Leaders care more for party than competent government

Editor's Note: Last week the Democratic leadership in Congress stripped Rep. Phil Gramm, D-Texas, of his preferred post on the House Budget Committee because he supported President Reagan's economic package. That decision prompted Gramm to resign from office, switch parties and seek re-election as a Republican. The following is a commentary in favor of Gramm's decision, written by a Texas A&M political science professor.

by Robert Bernstein

United Press International
House leaders recently stripped Phil Gramm of his seat on the budget committee. Their action has (at least temporarily) deprived the committee of a valuable member. Worse than that, their show of power tells the nation that its leaders are more interested in party loyalty than in competent government. The leaders have argued that their action was necessary in order to stop the flow of "secrets" to the Republican side. They have likened the Budget Committee to a football game: They felt justified in ousting a player from the huddle because he had revealed strategy to the opponents. The trouble with their analogy is that it views the parties as teams fighting against each other. They would do better to think of the committee, and indeed the whole Congress, as one team with a common goal. Especially when it comes to long-term economic programs, we all win or lose together. Unfortunately, House Democratic leaders are not looking at the common goal of government. Instead, by punishing Gramm, they are attempting to tighten the ranks of Democrats in order to prepare for war on the Republicans. House Speaker Tip O'Neill has given warning that he intends to lead a crusade

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against the President's programs. But it's difficult to lead a crusade when one of your best-known knights is imploring the troops to desert the cause. If Gramm had muted his opposition, if he had had less press coverage, if the Democratic leadership had had a more flexible, middle-of-the-road position, Gramm could have been tolerated. As it was, Gramm had to be punished for the sake of the crusade. That's one of the problems with crusades: They limit your flexibility. If you believe that you have seen the "one true path," that your opponents are "turncoats" or "neo-Nazis" or "enemies of the working man," it's hard for you ever to join with them in a common enterprise. Gramm, of course, wasn't the only Democrat to deviate from the "true path," but the leaders hardly could afford to punish all of the deviants. What they needed was to make an example of the one getting the most publicity. There is danger in moving towards a system of ideologically based parties, a system in which each party insists upon "discipline" from its members. Some people hold out such a system as an ideal toward which we ought to strive. Many of them now are applauding the decision to punish Gramm as a move in that direction. But European politics should give us fair warning of what that kind of party system can produce — violent shifts in government policies, sharp conflict between social classes, instability and little room for compromise. We are blessed with a party system that promotes continuity, stability and compromise — one that minimizes social cleavage and allows the formation and dissolution of coalitions within the Legislature without bringing down the government.

A move to make our parties more like the European parties is a move in the wrong direction. The action against Gramm is not just a move to strengthen party discipline, it is also a refusal to recognize the importance of competence in a representative. Gramm is a nationally known economist. The Budget Committee needs men of his stature. It is the committee where his expertise best can serve his country. His advice should be heard by that committee. By removing him from the Budget Committee, the leadership is telling us it values unthinking party loyalty and ideological conformity more than it values competence. Fortunately, Gramm is likely to be back on the Budget Committee in less than a month. He almost certainly will be returned to the House in the February special election, and the Republicans will hold open a committee seat for him. It is doubtful that the punishment dealt out by the House leadership will be detrimental to Gramm. Nevertheless, the leadership is being very short-sighted in preferring conformity to competence. Government programs characteristically have consequences that are not intended by their proponents, consequences that often worsen the problems they were designed to solve. To see and publicize the unintended consequences of proposed government programs, we need keen minds in the Congress. Only by electing our best people and putting them in positions where their expertise can be used, can we begin to cope with the massive load we have placed on our government. Making party loyalty or ideological conformity more important than competence is a misordering of priorities.

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Arrogant style and disloyalty, not votes, results in dismissal

by Jon R. Bond

United Press International
Although Phil Gramm was elected as a Democrat to represent the 6th Congressional District, he consistently has acted like a Republican. On party votes in 1981, Gramm voted with other Democrats only 20 percent of the time. That's lower support for his party than any other member of the Texas delegation. He voted with Republicans 77 percent of the time. Gramm's support of the Republican Party in Congress is higher than that of the average Republican. Gramm claims that his support of Republican proposals is what the people of the district want. But his extreme voting behavior puts him at odds with some Texas Democrats. The 1982 Brazos County Democratic Convention — Gramm's home county — adopted a resolution asking him to vote with his party more often. Although Gramm's voting record is extremely out of step with Texas Democrats and the Democratic House leadership, his removal from the Budget Committee was not punishment for voting with Republicans. Both parties welcome politicians with a wide range of views. Acceptance of diverse viewpoints is necessary if congressmen are to effectively represent their constituencies. Acts of party discipline in Congress, therefore, are rare. Parties do not discipline members for merely voting in accordance with their principles or their constituency. Rather, it takes extreme defiance — supporting the opposition's candidate in an election, or repeatedly opposing the party leadership on procedural issues — before a member is punished. Gramm's case is no exception. He was not punished because of how he voted. There are several House Democrats who voted against other Democrats and with President Reagan as often as Gramm. Not one was punished. Gramm's support of Republican proposals, however, went well beyond voting. He challenged the Democratic leadership in the media, and took advantage of his committee seat to provide the opposition with inside information that helped them defeat Democratic budget proposals. It was Gramm's arrogant style and disloyalty, not his votes, that resulted in his punishment. I'm amazed that so many of his constituents are unhappy about disciplinary action to punish such behavior. I'm also a bit surprised that the opposing team is so anxious to accept such a player. Despite his extreme disloyalty, the Democratic leadership did not impose a severe punishment on Gramm. He was not kicked out of the Democratic Caucus; he was not stripped of his seniority; he was not removed from the Energy and

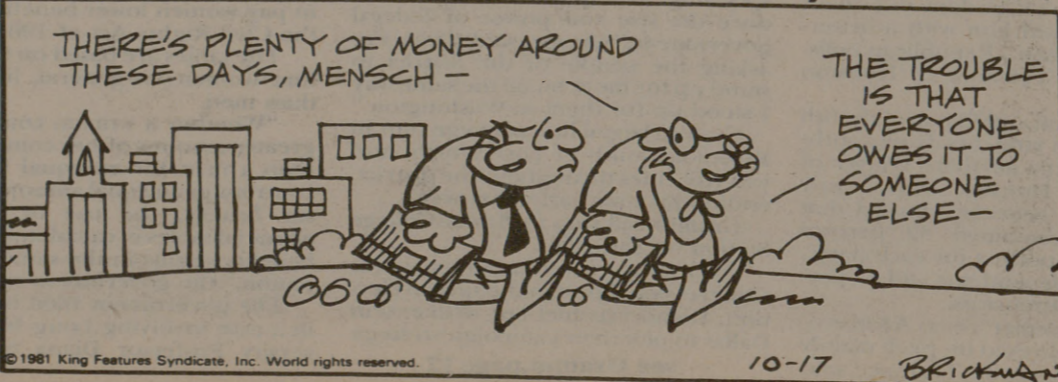
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Commerce Committee — a very powerful committee. Instead, he was denied reappointment to the Budget Committee. Because House members are eligible to serve on the Budget Committee for a maximum of six years, Gramm would have rotated off in another term or two anyway. Thus, the removal was a relatively mild form of punishment that would not have severely limited his ability to represent his district. If he really wanted to represent "district" interest, he should have remained a Democrat and kept his seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee. Because the 6th District is an oil-producing area, membership on Energy and Commerce is much more important to Gramm's constituency than membership on the Budget Committee. And if he had not switched to the minority party, Gramm probably would have accumulated enough seniority to be subcommittee chairman in a few more years. Gramm's argument that removing him from the budget committee has denied his constituents effective representation, therefore, has a hollow ring. Why would someone with a sincere concern for the interests of his constituency give up the prospect of a leadership position on a committee of direct relevance to his district in return for minority party status on a committee of less direct relevance to his district? I suspect that a partial answer is that the Budget Committee is more likely to provide a forum to gain national attention. If the district has been denied effective representation, it's not because the Democratic leadership disciplined a disloyal member. Rather, it is the result of Gramm putting his personal interest and radical ideology ahead of his constituents. The argument that Gramm's expertise as an economist is needed on the Budget Committee is not persuasive. Congress has a staff of excellent economists who provide information

and advice. But economic expertise is not helpful in making political decisions about political priorities in the budget. What is needed on the Budget Committee is someone with an open mind who is willing to weigh conflicting goals in a political process of bargaining and compromise. Dogmatic ideologues, even those with economic training, do not help the Budget Committee make responsible decisions. The disciplinary action taken by the Democrats does not threaten to move the American party system toward the European model of ideological parties with strong discipline. Democrats in the House are — and continue to be — more ideologically diverse and less disciplined than Republicans. Support for conservative positions among Democrats on the Budget Committee in 1981 ranged from a high of 99 percent to a low of 12 percent. Without Gramm the range is from 76 to 12 percent. The range of conservative support among Republicans on the Budget Committee, on the other hand, is about half as great — from 99 to 61 percent. We find a similar pattern if we examine the party discipline dimension. Among Democrats on the Budget Committee, party support ranged widely from 88 percent to 20 percent (88 to 40 percent if Gramm is excluded). But Republicans on the Budget Committee were much more disciplined, ranging from 89 to 67 percent party support. The Democratic leadership was right to discipline Gramm. They didn't do anything the Republicans wouldn't have done in a similar situation. As one of Gramm's constituents, I am glad that he is finally in the Republican Party where he belonged from the start of his political career. The way he went about making the switch, however, seems to have been designed to attract the most media attention for the longest possible time. But what better way to lay the foundation for a Senate race in two years? You can't buy that kind of exposure.

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Berry's World



"You're looking at a private sector 'lame duck!'"

PACs can make a big difference

by Clay F. Richards

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Much has been written about the big conservative political action committees that spend their money blantly and controversially. The best known — or at least most notorious — is the National Conservative Political Action Committee, which spent \$9 million in the last election cycle to defeat liberal members of Congress. The only one on their target list who lost was Sen. Howard Cannon, D-Nev., who had a lot of problems in addition to NCPAC and likely would have lost anyway. Altogether, PACs spent \$183 million during the 1982 congressional election cycle — up nearly 50 percent from what they spent in the previous two year campaign period. The amount of money spent and the rapid growth of PACs has raised alarms by good-government groups over the impact of special interest money on Congress. But the PAC situation may well be a case where the tip of the iceberg may be of much more concern than what is under the water. The tip of the \$183 million iceberg is the \$70 million — about 43 percent — of the PAC money that is given directly to candidates. But the \$70 million PACs gave directly to candidates represented a significant part of the \$300 million Common Cause estimated was spent by candidates for the House and Senate in 1982. It was not the big conservative groups that

gave the most money to candidates — though they had the most to spend. It was the special interest groups. The Realtors Political Action Committee gave the most money to candidates, followed by the American Medical Association Political Action Committee with \$1.5 million and the United Auto Workers with \$1.5 million. Also in the top 10 were teachers, bankers, home builders, producers, automobile and truck dealers. Those 10 groups represent a good portion of the major lobbying efforts in Washington. They cannot individually give more than \$5,000 to any one candidate. But the law does not prohibit 10 unions from giving each or 10 agriculturerelated groups doing the same for their candidates. In the most expensive Senate race in the country this year, Republican Pete Wilson spent \$5.1 million and Democrat Ed Bradley Brown Jr. spent \$3.9 million. Wilson received \$816,000 in PAC money, more than anywhere else in the country, and he won. This case — and the hundreds of campaigns where PACs made a big difference — does not mean Wilson is beholden to special interests. It does suggest they have access to office when they want to argue legislation. And it means in a close race as in California the PACs and not the people may have made the difference.

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