Congress Threatens Kennedy's Program

By EUGENE KEILIN

Having exhausted the traditional period of grace granted by Congress to a new executive, President Kennedy faces stiff congressional opposition to much of his legislative program. Confronted with restless discontent among conservatives in his own party, Kennedy must weld together an effective and dependable coalition of like-minded legislators from both parties to secure approval of his proposals.

In customary fashion, the Senate offered little opposition to New Frontier executive appointments (with the exception of the choice for Ambassador to Switzerland, withdrawn after criticism by the Senate and the Swiss government) while the House busied itself with procedural measures.

The first real fight came over the proposed change in the House Rules Committee, after which both Houses have stood in virtual adjournment while the Republicans celebrated Lincoln's birthday, and both sides prepared for the real struggle just now beginning.

In addition to the general hostility which has existed between Congress and the President since the Roosevelt era, the executive branch of the government is traditionally liberal while the Congress is customarily conservative. This division is a result of the nature of the electorate from which each receives its power: the large cities usually elect the President (as they did in this past election) and the rural vote normally elects a majority of the legislators. Many Representatives are selected from gerrymandered districts which are neither contiguous nor compact, and many Senators must depend for support upon State organizations drawn from similar territories.

The Rules Committee vote seems to foreshadow the integration of the Southern Conservative-Northern Labor coalition within the Democratic party. Kennedy hopes that Rayburn and Johnson will be able to keep this voting bloc partially intact while others concentrate on a consolidation of big-city legislators from both parties, despite determined White House efforts, the chairmen of all the major Senate committees are opposed to most of the Kennedy proposals.Ellender of Louisiana, Fulbright of Arkansas, Robertson of Virginia, McClellan of Arkansas, Byrd of Virginia, and Eastland of Mississippi will fight the President on the heart of his program: Civil Rights, health insurance under Social Security, and increase in the minimum wage to $1.25 over a three year period. Controlling the powerful Agriculture, Foreign Affairs, Banking and Currency, Operations, Finance and Judiciary committees, these men are in position to slow down or modify the bulk of the Kennedy program.

Faced with this opposition, the President is not without strong weapons of his own. The choice of Johnson as Kennedy's Vice-President brought with it the powerful support of tough House Speaker, Sam Rayburn.

The House Rules fight was a victory for Rayburn's prestige and the Administration's pressure over Republican party-line opposition, southern regional loyalty (to embattled chairman Smith) and congressional tradition.

A vigorous President with Congressional majorities from his own party controls vast patronage within and without the party. Kennedy, Johnson, Rayburn, and Mansfield are skilled professionals at the game of political power, able to use it as a great deal of both little and doubly impressive when provided with full a arsenal.

The President would like to see action on his program completed by June 30. If congressional apathy and opposition (Continued on Page 3)
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(Continued from Page 2) continue to mount, he can make positive use of his most effective weapon, public opinion. That Kennedy knows the value of public opinion and is able to mobilize it behind his policies has been demonstrated by his use of the televised press conference and publicized congressional messages. He knows the value of such appeals in a tough fight: congressmen are most vulnerable to pressure from their constituents.

The first session of the 87th Congress is of critical importance for the new President: it is his contention that the country is in immediate danger from a variety of forces and delayed action by the Congress would lessen his prestige and cast a shadow over the rest of his administration. Kennedy looks upon the White House as an instrument for setting a unity of national purpose, a unity which he must first impress upon the Congress.