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Fax for Will Marshall

Will —

I only got about 10 minutes with McCurdy before the bell rang and he had to go and vote.

But I did spent an hour or more with the staff person he has working on the amendment they want to try to put on when the bill comes to the floor.

I'm not sure about it all. I sure wouldn't push them to try for the Senate language. I'd be comfortable with their bringing it on as something for the local district to do. Then talk about it in conference.

It's just that the congressional interest scares me. It's such a 'power' town . . . everybody is so intimidated by the interest groups, and the groups really are so strong . . . that the potential for getting much done is probably fairly small. ~~the risk of~~ *the risk of* the risk of the opponents putting on some kind of terribly restrictive provision . . . the down-side potential . . . is pretty large. At the same time the information level is low. The folks around Congress, because the federal government doesn't really get into the basic structure and operation of the system, don't have the level of sophistication you find around a state legislature about the institution and its issues. It all makes you very nervous.

I wish we could get people in Washington to think in terms of the political leadership moving proposals into the process of state law-making. But they just don't. Especially in an election year it's as if that whole side of our national government doesn't exist. This was clear again with Bradley's aide. Their whole mind-set is to write bills for Congress. When you suggest leadership moving toward the states they say things like, "What teeth would it have?"

If people based in Washington can't or won't do it, the best thing they can do is to "do no harm", and to leave the field clear for the governors and state legislators. The more I think about my session at the Department the more comfortable I am with what I said: that the real problem ~~was~~ is that the reward-system is defective; that this problem is a feature of state law; that it can be fixed only by a change in law; that money will not help; and that leadership focused on Congress is a distraction.

Ted