

# Two Congressmen and a Bill for Atlanta

ATLANTA is virtually certain to receive a substantial sum to improve a huge section of the city under the demonstration cities act, but it is not certain at all of having the help of its two Republican congressmen.

Congress passed the bill last year. It is intend to strike at the roots of many of our problems in the slums and in areas that are not yet slums but soon may be. Selected cities across the nation will be the first to receive funds, under a "demonstration" concept; of course, if the plan works well, other cities presumably might follow suit.

Atlanta is privileged in that it almost certainly would be in the first list of cities, and accordingly it already has made plans in a 3,000-acre area of southeast Atlanta. (That is an area five times as large as our biggest present urban renewal area.)

Slum buildings would be cleared. Others would be renovated. New structures would be built. And most important, the plan goes beyond traditional urban renewal in that it ties together almost all the governmental efforts that directly affect a slum area.

Housing improvement alone is not the answer. Good housing and disgraceful schools, for example, are not a combination likely to break the cycle for slum people. Under the demonstration cities plan, bad schools in the designated area of the city would be improved. Employment training and placement would be furthered. In short, the program addresses itself to the whole range of the slums' worst problems—those that, eventually, affect the whole city.

Congress, having passed the bill, now must fund it. One might assume that any congressman from the Atlanta area, at least, would be working hard for any plan that would strike at these problems so pressing for Atlanta.

Atlanta Journal  
But things have changed for Atlanta in Washington. Two Democratic congressmen who helped put the demonstration cities bill through Congress have been replaced by two Republican congressmen whose positions are somewhat uncertain at this point.

Rep. Fletcher Thompson of the 5th District, who had our support against a so-so Democratic nominee, now says there is "a strong probability" he will support legislation to finance the program this year.

That is good news. Mr. Thompson cannot serve his constituency if he is against such legislation; he cannot serve it if he is only tolerant or permissive about such legislation; he can serve it only if he becomes a strong advocate of solutions for city problems—and not an advocate in generalities only.

Rep. Ben Blackburn of the 4th District, on the other hand, speaks negatively of the bill already approved and of the bill now to finance it. He expresses his negativism in terms of the plan's being "a great theory," "not a pure bouquet of roses without any thorns," and so on. But the general weight of what he has said so far is negative.

Race enters in, of course, in some of the judgments being made. This plan, like other federal programs, must be administered without racial bias. In Congress, racism already has been obvious in some of the efforts made against the plan. We wonder sometimes whether that is not always the main consideration with many who oppose such legislation.

That makes no sense.

"This means a lot to Atlanta," Rep. Thompson said.

That is about it.

# People As Well As Buildings

Last year Congress approved in principle the President's "demonstration cities" plan. It is noble in purpose and wide in scope, but so far it has only a pinch-penny budget.

Even if and when Congress appropriates the multibillion-dollar fund President Johnson seeks, cities will not share equally. Some won't get anything at all.

A city's chances will depend not so much on size as on its ability to convince federal officials it has the know-how and the willingness to carry out the purposes of the act.

Those purposes are admirable. The demonstration cities idea goes far beyond any old urban renewal plan. Like urban renewal, it would be concerned with physical rehabilitation of an area. But unlike urban renewal, it would concentrate on social rehabilitation of the people who live in the slums.

The program thus would require close coordination of health, education, welfare, recreation and other social services. It would require a coherent plan and competent administrators.

This week Atlanta submitted its ambitious proposal for a 3,000-acre demonstration area south of I-20 and east of West Whitehall. In it are 19 per cent of the city's "poverty households," 36 per cent of its slum housing, 20 per cent of its illiterates, 25 per cent of its juvenile delinquency and a high mortality rate. Sixty per cent of its residents are Negro and 40 per cent white.

Competition for demonstration city funds will be fierce. Just last Wednesday, some 500

C 1/27  
city officials from eight Southeastern states attended a conference here to learn more about the program.

But we believe Atlanta's chances will be good. It has demonstrated that it understands the concept and that its officials have the technical knowledge to coordinate and administer the program wisely.

Approval of the project would be a major asset to the city. The area is larger than all the urban renewal projects put together. In it are concentrated many of the city's hard-core problems. And the federal government could pay as much as 90 per cent of the cost.

We'll keep our fingers crossed and hope that Congress comes through with adequate funds.

## 'It Means a Lot to Atlanta'

C 2/10  
Congressman Fletcher Thompson of Atlanta is showing signs that he is more interested in addressing the needs of his constituents than in cleaving to a fixed set of political slogans.

He has indicated that he may support the model cities bill, and we like his explanation.

As a Republican, Rep. Thompson said he was displeased by certain parts of the legislation. "But until such time as I have a meaningful alternative, I must take a realistic approach . . . I'll be darned if I'm going to throw something out the door just because I didn't propose it."

The freshman congressman remarked that the bill "means a lot to Atlanta." It does indeed. If model-city funds were approved for the city according to plans already submitted by local officials, Atlanta could begin the

most comprehensive improvement program ever attempted.

The proposed model area consists of 3,000 acres in southeast Atlanta. By contrast, the city's largest urban renewal area, West End, comprises only 675 acres.

And not only would slum dwellings be cleared, other buildings renovated and new housing built, but a complete range of social services would be provided the residents in the area: education and vocational training, health care, counseling. The model cities program is people-oriented.

Rep. Thompson is wise not to reject the plan just because it is not perfect in every detail. We hope his perspective will be shared by Rep. Ben Blackburn, his freshman Republican colleague in the neighboring Fourth District. Mr. Blackburn, alas, talks like a man who can't see the roses for the thorns. But he may take a second look.