

As Others See Us

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The revolt against U.S. House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill fizzled, as expected. There never was a chance that House Democrats would deny "Tip" the chance to go out at the top of the heap after a third of a century of congressional service.

That doesn't mean that O'Neill is universally esteemed by his colleagues or that his politics are held in high regard by the public.

Rep. Charles Stenholm, the Texas "Boll Weevil" who had planned to challenge O'Neill for speaker but backed off in the interest of party unity, said one Democratic congressional candidate in the Lone Star State "had to spend 75 percent of his time convincing people that he was not a Tip O'Neill Democrat."

One of O'Neill's admirers, a liberal columnist, tried the other day to explain the speaker's political problems as a product of his physical appearance: "It was his girth, not his worth, that made him vulnerable." Nothing could be less likely. Opposition to O'Neill had little to do with his weight or how he looked on TV.

O'Neill was open to attack because he symbolized big spending, high taxes and swollen government. His political philosophy is of a Democratic generation whose thinking is out of tune with the electorate, as the Reagan-Mondale race demonstrated.

Still, the speaker occupies a powerful position as the leader of the one bastion of federal government that the Democratic Party controls.

In the 99th Congress, will he use his power to obstruct and undermine the Republican administration?

Or will he help the Reagan White House and the Republican-controlled Senate craft a legislative program that will attack the massive federal deficits and keep the nation on the road of economic progress?

Even O'Neill seemed to concede a few days before he was reelected speaker that the public is moving away from his liberal philosophy to a more conservative one.

He ought to keep that in mind as he plays out his final hurrah.

Village Advertiser Commentary

Although "Tip" O'Neill, to many Massachusetts voters, personifies a particular segment of Boston's citizenry and owes primarily to that constituency his political campaign successes, his abilities to exert enormous influence upon his fellow Democrats in the House of Representatives over the years have brought him national as well as local notoriety.

We applaud the perception displayed in the accompanying editorial published in the Solid South where, until recently, any Democratic candidate who had the blessing of the party was assured of a successful campaign.

Some of O'Neill's chickens may be coming home to roost.