

Sunday, April 23, 1961

CAPITOL HILL

Corpus Christi Congressman Looking Over Shoulder As Stand on Padre Island Park Draws Fire

By JIM MATHIS

Chief of The Post Washington Bureau
WASHINGTON — Events political of more or less general interest:

If you should see a congressman with a slightly crooked neck, he may well be suffering from a kink caused by looking back over his shoulder at some bright young state representative with ambition.

Rep John Young of Corpus Christi hasn't quite got neck trouble yet, but he's been casting many a quick glance backward recently.

The cause is a personable young representative from Nueces County, Ronald Bridges.

Bridges unquestionably has designs on a higher political setting: When he will put them into motion may well depend upon the fate of bills now in the Congress creating a national seashore site on Padre Island.

BRIDGES HAS the popular position: He is for a full 88-mile park without a roadway. Young, meanwhile, has got-



Mathis

ten deeply involved with Rep Joe Kilgore of McAllen on a proposal to create a bare-bones park area of 65 miles with a \$9.5 million roadway down the center.

Young explains his position as one of compromise: Had he asked for more mileage in direct opposition to Kilgore, the measure would have died in the House.

What many observers really think is that Young may have been led down the proverbial garden path by Kilgore—even to eventual defeat. More senators and congressmen have been defeated in Western states over public park issues than over any other one issue. This could be true in Texas, also.

THAT YOUNG has begun to feel the heat of public pressure is obvious. When the mayor of Corpus Christi, who is also a promising young politician, comes fresh from a victory in a mayoralty election, accompanied by his victorious ticket, to plead for 88 miles; when the Nueces County court supports him; and when a state representative pays his own way 1,300 miles to testify, it should be crystal clear to the congressman that he is courting danger.

If these signs aren't enough, then there is the presence of former State Rep Bob Wheeler

on Sen Ralph Yarborough's staff. Wheeler is an ardent 88-miler, and has strong political backing in Atascosa, McMullen and Live Oak Counties in Young's district. While he has no ambitions to run for Congress at the present time, his advice and support would probably go to Bridges.

YOUNG HAS also been under fire from the potent Corpus Christi Caller and other area papers over his stand on the island park area. Organized labor is in staunch opposition to him. Even Dr Hector Garcia, the kingpin of Latin Americans in Corpus Christi, is said to be angry with Young over the park issue. All told, the congressman has cemented some formidable opposition certain to give him trouble in the next election.

It is something of a shame. Young has been a good congressman, working hard for his district. His failure now stems simply from an inability to grasp what his district voters want, or from allowing Kilgore to exert too much influence. In the end, it will be Young, not Kilgore, who loses.

There are other aspects of politics in this Padre Island issue. Sen William Blakley has joined with Kilgore on 65 miles, although it was obvious Blak-

ley wasn't fully briefed on what it was all about. Republicans, and especially John Tower, haven't taken full advantage of the statement, or underrate the popularity of the long park.

REPUBLICAN National Committeeman Albert Bel Fay of Houston long ago announced his support for 88 miles as requested by former Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

But Fay hasn't gotten his position in the record made in the Senate, which he could do by sending a telegram or letter to the ranking Republican on the Public Lands Subcommittee, Sen Henry C. Dworshak of Idaho. Dworshak has been critical of the park, but Fay could probably temper his opposition.

Similarly, a Texas Republican expression on the House side, with the parks subcommittee of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, would probably bring more interest in the bill.

This is a safely nonpartisan issue—Padre Island—and Republicans would certainly gain by joining with public sentiment. Their failure in Texas in the past to identify themselves with worthwhile public projects has been a distinct political handicap.

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VIEWPOINT

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—Jim Mathis' column in The Houston Post Sunday, April 23, 1961.