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**A House Divided: HD 85 The Great
Congress – II**

Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is "A House Divided."

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Despite its reputation for inertia, the U.S. Congress on occasion is capable of electrifying and revolutionary activity. But if the truth be known, such seasons of spectacular innovation occur more often than not when a single political party is in close

to absolute control of the levers of congressional power and Congress is driven by an determined President of the majority party with visionary ambitions.

After the departure of the Confederates in 1861 the U.S. Congress began one of the most prolific periods in the American legislative experience. From the beginning of the Republic the South had dominated U.S. political life. Because of the peculiarities of the electoral system, after the Jeffersonian Revolution of 1800, the Southern, conservative, agrarian slave-ocracy maintained a lock on Congress, particularly the Senate and often on the Presidency. There it defended

states' rights and opposed attempts by nationalists to secure Federal support for internal improvements and tariffs designed to protect American industrial development. Above all the Southerners sought to deflect political attacks on the institution of slavery.

With the Southern faction in rebellion and no longer present to block progress, the Congress of 1860 revolutionized the tax code, made it progressive, created the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and re-ordered the monetary structure of the U.S. to support a gigantic war machine. It then began an enormous distribution of public lands, expanded higher education, laid the groundwork for a national system of transportation

designed specifically to support the growth of industrial enterprise, and took the first tentative steps toward the eradication of the curse of slavery. And it did so in the middle of the greatest war in American history. Not exactly a shabby record, indeed it has been called revolutionary.

One such legislative triumph was the Homestead Act passed on May 20, 1862. Rolling over tepid Democratic and border-state antagonism, the Republican majority granted 160 acres of public land to any immigrant, male or female, following five years of habitation and enhancement of the claim. By 1865, 25,000 had claimed more than 3,000,000 acres. By the time the program had reached its apex,

500,000 farmers were occupying 80,000,000 acres of homesteads. This helped claim and populate vast stretches of the continent with the promise of free arable land luring American and foreign immigrants into the heartland

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Resources

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