

## Congressional Closeup by William C. Jones

### House passes ban on flag desecration

The House voted 380-38 on Sept. 12 to ban the physical defacing of the American flag, after House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) reached a compromise with Republicans and agreed to allow a vote later this year on a constitutional amendment. Foley said that he will call up an amendment after the Senate acts on the issue in October.

In a highly controversial ruling this summer, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that it would be an unconstitutional violation of the right to "free speech" to ban the burning of the flag.

Foley is hoping that Senate Democrats will succeed in blocking the amendment, but the compromise virtually ensures that the flag-burning issue will become the focus of an amendment initiative.

Most Republicans, following President Bush's lead, want to make the flag-burning issue the subject of a constitutional amendment. Most House Democrats, civil rights activists, and some conservatives are concerned that making flag-burning the object of a constitutional amendment would open the door for other, dangerous amendments, thereby undermining the stability of the U.S. Constitution.

### Hamilton to continue Iran-Contra probe

Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), who chaired the House committee that investigated the Iran-Contra affair, said in a letter made public the second week in September, that because of new documents and other evidence that surfaced in the trial of Lt. Col. Oliver North, "I do not believe we can consider the congressional investigation

of the Iran-Contra affair to be complete."

In the letter to Intelligence Committee chairman Rep. Anthony C. Beilenson (D-Calif.), Hamilton added: "Most importantly, we still do not understand precisely what were the roles in these events of President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and other top Reagan administration officials."

### Gregg nomination passes Senate under cloud

The controversial nomination of Donald P. Gregg as U.S. ambassador to South Korea cleared the Senate on Sept. 12. by a 66-33 vote.

Gregg, a career CIA agent who was Vice President Bush's national security adviser from 1982 through 1988, oversaw the administration's policy toward the secret Iran-Contra arms deals. In his May 1987 testimony to the congressional committee, many congressmen believed he was lying outright, in order to conceal the extent of Bush's knowledge of the illegal deals.

The suspicion under which Gregg was approved was best described by Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) who said, "It does not take a suspicious or partisan mind to look at all the documentary evidence, the back-channel cables, the 'eyes only' memos, and then to conclude that Mr. Gregg has not been straight with the U.S. Senate. Indeed, more than one Republican senator who looked at the accumulated weight of the evidence against Mr. Gregg remained unconvinced and sought Mr. Gregg's withdrawal. . . . I recognize that most of my colleagues on the Republican side feel intense pressure to vote in lockstep for the President's man. I regret that. But I believe such a decision would be most

unwise and would do significant injury to this body."

Majority leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) said that he opposed the nomination on grounds of Gregg's "credibility and judgment."

But Sen. Charles Robb (D-Va.) helped Gregg's nomination along, arguing that the Senate was not just passing judgment on Gregg, but also "on the veracity of the President himself." Robb admitted that the Gregg testimony before the House Foreign Relations Committee had "a few anomalies," but claimed that the Gregg case was merely "a case of guilt by association."

### Helms porno bill blocked in House

Opponents of the Helms amendment that would prevent government funding of "obscene or indecent materials" or material that denigrates religious beliefs or people, was blocked on a procedural motion in the House by a 264-153 vote on Sept. 13.

The bill, which was in reaction to an exhibit of blatant sado-masochistic photographs by homosexual artists Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, was aimed at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which funded the exhibition. One Serrano photograph showed a crucifix submerged in a container of his urine, and was included in a traveling exhibit supported by the NEA.

The Helms amendment had passed the Senate and was to be introduced into the House by Dana Rohrbacher (R-Calif.). Rohrbacher was blocked on a procedural vote from offering the motion. The NEA has been up in arms since the Helms measure passed the Senate, and has put pressure on its congressional supporters to stop the

bill in the House. House opponents of the bill wanted to avoid a floor vote on the sensitive issue and hoped to remove the legislation in conference.

Copies of Mapplethorpe's photographs were put on display outside the House chamber in an area restricted to House members, their staff, and the news media, in order to give them a taste of what the "exhibition" was all about. Two of the pictures showed children exposing themselves, and several others showed acts of sado-masochism. The photos were later removed by the House sergeant-at-arms, after numerous members and reporters crowded around them. Rep. George Brown (D-Calif.), presiding over the House during the debate, refused to allow them to be displayed on the floor.

The defeat is seen, however, as only a temporary setback for pornography foes. The House vote, according to Capitol Hill sources, has set the stage for a showdown in the Senate, where Helms is expected to seek a roll-call vote on the ban.

(See also article on page 61.)

## **Medellín Cartel said to target Bush**

Diego Viafara Salinas, a self-described former medic in the Medellín drug cartel from Colombia, testified before a Senate Government Affairs subcommittee on Sept. 14 on the special training given to terrorist hit squads that have carried out professional assassinations of top political figures in Colombia. Viafara shocked the committee by stating that the drug cartel leaders are considering deploying these hit teams into the United States for use against figures who they think are leading the war against them, including the President.

Viafara testified from behind a screen at the hearings, and is participating in the U.S. Federal Witness Protection Program.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, asked on Sept. 14 by *EIR* whether these revelations meant that the U.S. military now has its own national security interests to take into account beyond assisting the Colombian government, replied that "it serves no purpose for us to comment on such security matters."

## **Japan-U.S. deal on FSX survives Senate**

The Senate failed by one vote on Sept. 13 to override President Bush's veto of proposed restrictions on the joint production of the FSX jet fighter by the United States and Japan. Eight Republicans shifted their original votes on the project to ensure a victory for Bush and U.S.-Japanese cooperation.

President Bush framed the issue on constitutional grounds, by asserting that the conditions set by the resolution would infringe on the President's authority to negotiate with foreign governments. The supporters of the veto also said that a rejection of the bill would have forced a renegotiation of the agreement to build the FSX, which the Senate failed to kill in a narrow 47-52 vote in May.

## **Liberals attempt rules change to gut defense**

Liberal House Democrats, led by Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), have established a special panel to set funding for strategic weapons, according to the *Washington Times*.

Sources told the *Times* that Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.) proposed the creation of the panel in order to head

off a back-room effort by liberals to have House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) appoint conferees from outside the Armed Services Committee. The liberals are demanding conferees who support the deep cuts made by the House in four key strategic programs pushed by President Bush—the Strategic Defense Initiative, the MX and Midgetman missiles, and the B-2 bomber.

The appointment of the 16-member panel takes major strategic decisions out of the hands of a few senior Armed Services members and places them with a more liberal cross-section of the committee. The liberals' efforts to reshape the conference was also seen as a swipe at Aspin, who angered some of his fellow Democrats by calling the defense budget in the aftermath of the sweeping House cuts a "Dukakis defense budget."

## **Frank loses support in prostitution scandal**

Massachusetts Rep. Barney Frank (D) is fast losing voter support, as the scandal involving a former aide, homosexual prostitute Steve Gobie, comes under the scrutiny of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct.

Nearly 7 out of 10 voters living in Frank's 4th Congressional District say he should be disciplined by the ethics panel, according to a recent poll conducted by KRC Communications Research.

Although 61% of the respondents said Frank, one of the two self-proclaimed homosexuals in the Congress, should remain in office and run again, only 33% of those answering thought that a congressman who admits to violating the law is fit to continue to serve.