

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

House approves probe of 'October Surprise'

The House voted on Feb. 5 to begin an investigation into allegations that the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign conspired with Iranian officials to delay release of 52 Americans held hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Teheran. The 217-192 vote was along sharp party lines, with no Republicans voting for the investigation and only 34 Democrats voting against it.

Threats of a Republican filibuster killed a Senate investigation of the "October Surprise" last year, and the issue has been relegated to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. House rules, however, allowed the Democratic majority to bring the legislation to the floor for a vote, despite unanimous Republican opposition.

The legislation authorizing the investigation creates a 13-member bipartisan task force which is expected to spend \$1.2-2.5 million in an attempt to ascertain the truth of the allegations. There has been no time limit placed on the investigation, but the head of the task force, Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), is required to report to the House on its progress by July 1.

The debate was raucous, with Republicans up in arms about the very idea of an investigation. Rep. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) referred to the coverage of the "October Surprise" in *Newsweek* and *New Republic*, which called the allegations "a conspiracy theory run wild." (The *Newsweek* coverage claimed that the "October Surprise" was a concoction of *EIR*. Roberts, a member of the subcommittee responsible for the Federal Election Commission, had also gone on a rampage in a district meeting in Kansas over the fact that Lyndon LaRouche, the founding editor of *EIR*, has qualified for matching funds.) "Please, my colleagues,

enough," pleaded Roberts during the floor debate, "let us end this, and get to the business of reducing the deficit."

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) expressed concern that Oliver Stone, the producer/director of the "JFK" film, had expressed interest in also doing a film on the "October Surprise." Rohrabacher called the Democratic-backed resolution an example of "mean-spirited persecution" and "McCarthyism."

Committee chairmen seek new intelligence post

The chairmen of the House and Senate intelligence committees, Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.) and Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.), recommended on Feb. 5 a complete overhaul of the intelligence community, calling for the creation of a new post of Director of National Intelligence with authority to make military and civilian intelligence agencies work together at less cost, and to create a new government-wide structure for intelligence analysis.

The proposed legislation would strengthen ties between the intelligence community and the White House. The new Director of National Intelligence would become, in the Boren plan, a non-voting participant in the National Security Council. Both McCurdy and Boren agree that if the reform were implemented, that post would fall to present CIA head Robert Gates. It would essentially subordinate the military intelligence functions of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Air Force's super-secret National Reconnaissance Office to the intelligence czar.

Boren said that President Bush's

reaction to the proposal had been "one of appreciation." But the plan has, however, already drawn fire from critics in the defense intelligence agencies who say that the reorganization would stifle competitive analysis and penalize the military. Boren tried to assuage critics by assuring them that the new intelligence czar would have "absolutely no authority over the intelligence community for any kind of domestic surveillance."

START ratification could be delayed

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Feb. 5, Secretary of State James Baker III, who recently returned from a trip to Moscow where he presided over the Mideast peace negotiations, urged the Senate to begin ratification hearings on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) as soon as possible, in order to "lock in" the commitments which had been made with the now-defunct Soviet Union.

A number of key members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have asked that the treaty be signed by the new republics before they take up ratification, since these are the legitimate entities which will be responsible for meeting the demands of the treaty. Some senators also feel that amendments calling for deeper reductions could be included, since the Soviet Union has disappeared from the map since the treaty was negotiated.

The Bush administration, interested in U.S. control over developments in the republics, is anxious to cement the U.S.-Community of Independent States agreement. A compromise was reached in which the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will begin hearings in late February, but only with

non-government arms control experts as witnesses, thus postponing hearings with Baker and other government officials until after the State Department obtains legal commitments to the treaty by Russia and the other nuclear republics. Baker will return to Moscow in February, where he is expected to discuss getting "signature protocols" from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

GOPers target Speaker in post office scandal

House Republicans are accusing unnamed Democratic leadership officials of trying to keep secret the allegations of corruption and mismanagement at the House Post Office. The investigation has targeted House Postmaster Robert Rota, who, although not charged with any crime, is being attacked for "gross mismanagement." But the target of the scandal appears to be House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.). Rota claims, according to the *Washington Times*, that he was told to hush up an investigation of the House Post Office last year by Heather Foley, the Speaker's wife.

The scandal first surfaced in the *Washington Times*, which reported that Washington, D.C. U.S. Attorney Jay Stephens, who played a key role in putting Mayor Marion Barry in prison, was investigating criminal charges of cocaine sales, embezzlement, and check-kiting at the House Post Office.

The series in the *Washington Times*, which began on Jan. 22, set the stage for House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-Ill.) to call for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate the allegations. After

a heated 60-minute debate on the House floor on Feb. 5, House Democrats succeeded in turning over the post office investigation to the House Administration Committee.

House Republicans, anxious to turn the tables on the decision to investigate the "October Surprise," are now bantering about claims of Democratic "coverup" of the alleged post office scandal. Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) has labeled it the "February Surprise."

Nunn: Eagleburger 'clearly overburdened'

In floor comments on Feb. 7, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) called for assigning an official with "cabinet rank" to be responsible for issues pertaining to military conversion and scientific cadre within the republics of the former Soviet Union. Nunn's proposal would significantly downgrade the role of Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who is now taking the lead within the Bush administration for the "broader issues" associated with U.S.-Russian relations.

"The problem," Nunn said, "is that none of them [U.S. officials involved in various policy areas toward the republics] has an overall responsibility for a comprehensive, integrated plan and for coordinating between the various components, except for Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. I have the greatest respect for Secretary Eagleburger and his considerable diplomatic skills and experience. However, you cannot pick out a part of the world that he is not responsible for. . . . He cannot handle the whole world any more than any person can. With the responsibility of the whole world on his shoulders when Secretary Baker is out of the town—

which is a great deal of time, necessarily—plus the day-to-day operations of the State Department, Secretary Eagleburger is clearly overburdened."

Gore withdraws 'global warming' amendment

An amendment sponsored by Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) which would radically accelerate the rate at which chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) would be phased out of the economy, was squelched under threat of a Republican filibuster on Feb. 6. The Gore amendment would also mandate that the United States stabilize carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Senate Republicans led by Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) threatened to filibuster the Gore amendment. On the recommendation of Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bennett Johnston (D-La.), who was intent to avoid delay on the overall bill, Gore withdrew his amendment.

Another Gore amendment, similar in nature to the one withdrawn but without specific target dates, was passed by the Senate. The amendment called on the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to accelerate the phase-out of CFCs.

The amendment, coming at a time of acute economic crisis in which environmental regulatory measures required by the Clean Air Act have helped drive industry into bankruptcy, apparently moderated Bush administration pressure for the more radical environmental position. While favorable to the environmentalist agenda, the administration is increasingly sensitive to pressure from industry as the election nears.