

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Special prosecutor sought on 'Iraqgate'

Members of the House Judiciary Committee, including chairman Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), sent a letter to Attorney General William Barr on July 9 requesting that the Justice Department appoint an independent counsel to investigate whether the Bush administration violated the law in supporting Iraq before the Persian Gulf war.

"Our investigation and our request are not an attempt to second-guess the administration's policy in tilting toward Iraq," said Brooks. "The stupidity of that policy speaks for itself."

The request follows Judiciary Committee hearings to determine whether there was sufficient evidence to call for a special prosecutor. The request was supported by all but one of the Democrats on the committee, but by none of the Republicans. Barr now has 15 days to determine whether the information is specific enough to warrant a preliminary investigation.

The letter cites assertions that the administration interfered in the criminal prosecution of the Atlanta branch of the Italian-owned Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), which provided Iraq with loans and export credits. The discovery that a lawyer on President Bush's personal legal staff discussed the criminal investigation directly with the federal prosecutor in Atlanta was a decisive factor in the panel's submitting the request.

Commenting on the decision of the Judiciary Committee on the floor of the House on July 9, House Banking Committee Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), who initiated the investigations into the BNL scandal, pinpointed the role of National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft in determining the administration's Iraq policy. "It is now becoming increasingly clear that Mr. Scowcroft was the

key figure in the manipulation of the CCC [Commodity Credit Corp.] program for Iraq," said Gonzalez. "It is hard to imagine that Mr. Scowcroft did not also have a role in White House calls to the assistant U.S. attorney in Atlanta or the Justice Department's handling of the BNL scandal."

Russian aid languishes as Congress recesses

Although many congressmen were sympathetic to the plea of Russian President Boris Yeltsin for aid when he addressed a joint session of Congress on June 17, the so-called aid package is languishing in the House as Congress prepares to recess.

Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, and House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) have blamed the delay on reluctance to vote for foreign aid in an election year.

But the irony of the Russian aid package, entitled the Freedom Support Act, is that the only real money in the package is the authorization for a \$12 billion increase in the U.S. account with the International Monetary Fund, which is to enable the IMF to finance its operations worldwide. The \$417 million in direct bilateral assistance for Russia in the bill has already been passed as part of this year's foreign aid bill.

Hayes lambasts urban aid bill as a fraud

Rep. Charles Hayes (D-Ill.), in floor comments on July 2, attacked the urban aid package later passed by the Congress, as a remnant of the Reagan-Bush "trickle-down mentality."

"Instead of funding programs that

in the past have truly assisted our cities by creating jobs and rebuilding the infrastructure, the effort is to again spur the economy through tax incentives to corporate America and the wealthy," said Hayes. "While some will vote for this bill because they believe that some help is better than none at all, I cannot participate in what amounts to an election year hoax.

"If we do not begin to commit ourselves to addressing the plight of our urban cities," he warned, "then we jeopardize the future of our country as a whole."

House shifts foreign aid funds to transportation

In a move which undermines the 1990 budget agreement between Congress and the White House, the House on June 9 agreed to take \$400 million in foreign aid savings and spend it on transportation. The Bush administration has threatened a veto, claiming the measure would trouble financial markets and cause interest rates to rise.

The vote in the House was 213-190, far short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto. The shift of the savings, originally intended for deficit reduction, was the result of a plea by House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), who urged his colleagues to "deal with a recession that's in front of us," with 10 million Americans out of work.

The Budget Act of 1990 divides all spending into three major categories—domestic, military, and foreign aid spending—and stipulates that there be no transfer of funds between categories. "Savings" made through budget cuts would have to go to other items in that same category or be used to reduce the deficit.

Conyers attacks Carnes nomination

In comments on the House floor July 9, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) criticized the Senate Judiciary Committee's recommendation of approval of the nomination of Edward Carnes to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Carnes is widely known for his pro-death penalty views. The Senate committee vote was 10-4.

Conyers attacked Carnes's "executioner mentality" and his role in protecting a practice in Alabama that keeps blacks off trial juries. Conyers said that "with the economy in shambles, this nomination is part of the President's new strategy to get the Southern white vote in the general election by once again playing the crime and race card, as he did during the last general election with the Willie Horton campaign."

Kennedy assassination archive not fully opened

The House Judiciary Committee has created a loophole, an amendment proposed by Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.), in legislation which calls for disclosure of government records concerning the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, ensuring that significant material will still be withheld from public scrutiny.

The amendment would place all materials touching on the assassination which are now in the John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Gerald R. Ford presidential libraries beyond the reach of the historical review board assigned to investigate the assassination. Under the Presidential Records Act of 1978, most records in presidential libraries, beginning with Ronald Reagan's, are defined as federal rather than private records, but

the law was not retroactive. The amendment means that Kennedy's autopsy records and X-rays are controlled by a deed of gift from the Kennedy family and are unavailable without the consent of the family. Also, the material from the Gerald Ford-appointed Commission to Investigate CIA Activity within the United States, is treated as the private property of Gerald Ford.

Push on to secure Space Station funding

In the floor debate in the House on July 8, the day the Space Shuttle Columbia was to complete its mission, Reps. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) and George Brown (D-Calif.) underlined the necessity for continued funding of Space Station Freedom.

"We must push forward with a space station if we are going to successfully and aggressively explore the final frontier of space," said Dornan. "We cannot turn back now, just as we approach the threshold of space exploration. We cannot limit ourselves to shortsighted, short-term cost savings that would result from cancellation of the station. . . . We must look forward, as explorer Christopher Columbus did 500 years ago when he brought two amazing worlds together."

Brown, chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, stressed the importance of the experiments on the Columbia. "The specific experiments that were conducted on this mission could lead to improved drugs, medical treatments, engineering materials, computers, infrared detectors, water desalination equipment, chemical and industrial processes, and the development of such wonders as artificial skin, blood vessels, and other parts of the body."

Brown pointed out that, although this flight (14 days) was the longest ever for the shuttle, the space station would be able to operate for many months or even years.

Trade bill passes Congress, faces veto

The Trade Expansion Act of 1992, dubbed the "Trade and Employment Contraction Act of 1992" by one of its opponents, was passed by the House on July 8 in a 280-145 vote, short of the votes needed to override a threatened presidential veto.

Although some of the more onerous measures were removed in committee, including one which called for negotiated limits on the sales of Japanese automobiles in the United States, the new "purged" bill is an attack on U.S. trading partners, Japan in particular.

The legislation extends the Super 301 authority for an additional five years, but goes one step further in requiring the U.S. Trade Representative to post a list of "trading enemies." The bill also targets Taiwan and Korea, mandating a Super 301 investigation by the Trade Representative with regard to products and auto parts within 45 days of its enactment.

Opponents argued that the measure will create even more acrimony in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations.

Also passed was an amendment sponsored by Reps. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Sander Levin (D-Mich.) which directs the President to negotiate an agreement with Japan that would limit the number of Japanese automobiles exported to the United States. The amendment was passed in 260-166 vote.