

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Clinton vows fight on education cuts

Speaking in San Francisco on Feb. 14 before the American Council on Education, the President charged the Republican leadership in Congress with considering education programs as "just another area to cut and gut." Clinton said that any desire to compromise with the new majority does not extend to such ideas as eliminating the Department of Education or scaling back changes made in his administration designed for financing student loans.

Clinton likened any move to eliminate the Department of Education to "undercutting the Department of Defense during the Cold War." While sympathetic to trimming government in some areas, he said, increased spending is needed to ensure prosperity in an economy based on technology and information.

House GOPers would cut four cabinet positions

After weeks of private deliberations encouraged by House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) and Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Livingston (R-La.), a group of freshmen and second-term GOPers called on Feb. 14 for the formation of four task forces to write legislation aimed at eliminating the departments of Commerce, Education, Energy, and Housing and Urban Development. The proposal would emasculate the power of the Executive branch of government.

"On the whole they do not have essential functions within the government," said Sam Brownback (R-Kan.). The freshmen outlined their arguments under the guiding principles of "privatize, localize, consolidate,

eliminate." Claiming that essential functions would still be preserved, several members proposed that individual programs or agencies would exist independently or be rolled into other departments.

The White House has already flatly rejected a proposal to consolidate the Agency for International Development, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the U.S. Information Agency into the State Department.

Faircloth accused of conflict of interest

Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.), who has led the charge against President Clinton, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy, and Commerce Secretary Ron Brown for alleged corruption, is himself being accused of a conflict of interest.

Faircloth chairs the Clean Air, Wetlands, Private Property, and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee of the Environment and Public Works Committee. Clean air and water environmental legislation coming out of his committee has driven undercapitalized family farmers out of business and forced them to become veritable serfs to the big operators, such as Faircloth's Coharie Hog Farms. The senator is estimated to have \$19 million invested in the industry, including large shares of Lundy Packing Co. and Smithfield Foods. The pork industry contributed heavily to his 1992 election.

While squealing against budget "pork" and "foreign aid," Faircloth signed a letter in October 1994 asking Agriculture Secretary Espy to subsidize the sale of 20,000 tons of pork to Russia "to help offset a 22-year low in hog prices."

Faircloth responded to criticism from the *Charlotte Observer* and local environmentalists by consulting the Senate Ethics Committee. Its counsel, Victor Baird, responded in December 1994, saying that Faircloth had not violated the Code of Ethics, since his legislative action was for the whole industry, not just for "the pecuniary interest of a limited class of persons or enterprises."

Garten warns on snubbing Asian developing nations

In testimony before a House International Relations subcommittee on Feb. 2, Undersecretary of Commerce Jeffrey Garten warned human rights, non-proliferation, and other activists in the administration not to make trade, commerce, and investment hostage to the resolution of other issues.

While agreeing that such issues as human rights, intellectual property rights, and market access were to be resolved, Garten pointed out to the legislators that the so-called big emerging markets (BEMs) countries will be "our markets of today, and especially tomorrow, or they will certainly be the markets of our competitors." Garten emphasized the immense potential for development in China, India, Indonesia, and Korea, four of the 10 BEMs. "China must build two major electric power plants a month well into the next century," he said. "Put another way, it has to add the installed generating capacity of Southern California every year for the next decade. . . . India, sometime in the first half of the next century, will pass China as the world's most populous nation. It has similar requirements. There are 7 million phone lines in a population of 900 million people, less than the number in New

York City alone. India's middle class may be equivalent in size to over half the population of the United States. There are seven Indian states which are larger than France."

Indonesia, "another of our Asian BEMs, has the world's fourth-largest population, an archipelago of 13,000 islands, that is now ready to link those islands by planes, satellites, power grid, air traffic network, and port system," Garten said. South Korea, the fourth BEM in Asia, "is perhaps the most dynamic recovery story in the world, the first developing market since Japan to graduate to big league status and already an important trading partner despite a still severely restricted market."

Byrd continues attack on balanced budget amendment

Speaking on the Senate floor on Feb. 16, Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) pressed his attack against the balanced budget amendment, raising a number of constitutional issues, including the attempt by Republicans to make it well-nigh impossible to raise taxes. Byrd said that he had overheard a Republican senator say that he would never vote for tax increases. "That kind of an attitude," Byrd said, "is never going to get this budget in balance."

Byrd pointed out that "the men who framed the Constitution provided for revenues to be raised to pay debts, to provide for the common defense and the general welfare, but if we are going to take the position that the only thing we will support is to cut, cut, cut programs, but we will not raise taxes, then we are cheating our children and grandchildren."

Byrd had earlier attacked the super-majority provisions in the amendment as injecting "a minority veto into

the ordinary processes of the determination of fiscal policy within the Legislative branch." He warned that this creates a danger that "a minority in either house can hold the legislative agenda hostage, blocking majority choices until minority factions obtain the policy concessions that they want."

Stormy debate expected over farm subsidies

Thirty-three of the 73 new Republicans in the House are from rural agricultural districts, casting doubt on their commitment to the "Contract with America" when it comes to cutting farm subsidies from the budget. Government policy has favored the cartels and rejected setting a parity or cost-of-production price to farmers, and has instead provided subsidies in order to slow the rate of farm bankruptcies; since 1985, some \$149 billion has been spent nationwide.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and Rep. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), who heads the House Agriculture Committee, have both advocated cutting government spending, returning more power to the states, and balancing the budget. But recently, Dole only offered to the American Farm Bureau Federation that "some cuts will be made." Roberts has defended subsidies, saying they have decreased (with the loss of many farms) to \$10.2 billion in 1994, from \$25.8 billion in 1985. Roberts's district over the last decade has received more subsidies than any other. Agriculture cuts for the Republicans were supposed to be among the least difficult targets for budget cutting.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), who recently oversaw the closing of over 1,000 local Farm Bureau offices

as part of "reinventing government," says that farm subsidies are justifiably seen as a test of Republican resolve: "Will we act? I would guess that subsidies will be cut at least in half over the next five years. But I also see phasing out subsidies in five years, if not completely then in such a way that there is only some minimal safety net."

Balanced budget amendment in doubt

As we go to press, the outcome of the Senate vote on the balanced budget amendment, set for Feb. 28, is expected to be within one to two votes either way. Seven Democrats are fence-sitters, but Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), who voted for the amendment twice before, has announced that he will vote no. His reasons are that there were no provisions to save Social Security and that Republicans have given no indication of what they plan to cut.

As far back as Jan. 22, Majority Leader Bob Dole said the Senate did not have the votes to pass a balanced budget amendment if it included a clause requiring a three-fifths majority vote in Congress to raise taxes.

Asked about proposals to cut off benefits to welfare mothers under 18 if they don't work, Dole said on the CBS News program "Face the Nation," "I don't think it's going to happen. . . . Somebody still has an obligation . . . somebody has to take care of the child. . . . So I don't believe we can do that. I wouldn't recommend that."

Asked about cutting off government benefits to legal (not just illegal) aliens, Dole said, "That's not going to happen." He said that if they are legal immigrants, and they are here under our law, "then I think we have some obligation. Obviously we want them brought into society."