

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Fight looms over renewed relations with Vietnam

President Clinton announced on July 11 in a ceremony at the White House, that he was normalizing relations with Vietnam. The President was joined by senators and congressmen who have fought for recognition, including Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a former POW who was held in North Vietnam.

President Clinton praised the efforts made to locate all the missing-in-action (MIAs), an issue that has caused much delay in normalizing relations. "Never before in the history of warfare has such an extensive effort been made to resolve the fate of soldiers who did not return," he said.

President Clinton had promised to guarantee that the Vietnamese were cooperating in trying to locate MIAs before he would call for normalization. Last year, he lifted the trade embargo on Vietnam, citing Hanoi's cooperation in accounting for those still missing in action from the Vietnam War. "I believe normalization and increased contact between Americans and Vietnamese will advance the cause of freedom in Vietnam just as it did in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union," the President stated. "I strongly believe that engaging the Vietnamese on the broad economic front of economic reform and the broad front of democratic reform will help to honor the sacrifice of those who fought for freedom's sake in Vietnam."

McCain and Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), also a decorated Vietnam vet, have teamed up to argue the case in the Senate. McCain is preparing to introduce a sense of the Senate resolution calling for recognition.

Despite the efforts of McCain and others, the issue has been a prickly one for many Republicans. Rep. Bob Dornan (R-Calif.) called the move a

"disgrace." Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, said he would bring legislation to the House floor blocking funds to build an embassy in Vietnam or in any way facilitate normalizing relations. A few, like Dornan and Sen. Bob Smith (R-N.H.), are still pressing the POW-MIA issue. Even Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), sensing the potential of the issue as a campaign item, has expressed his reservations on the President's moves.

NASA targeted despite Shuttle-Mir success

On July 11, the Veterans, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations slashed \$720 million from the President's request of \$14.26 billion for next year's space program. The measure is fully consistent with the House Speaker Newt Gingrich's Conservative Revolution budget-gouging.

The proposal would shut down the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, and the Langley Research Center in Virginia, and eliminate or delay key science programs including the Cassini spacecraft to Saturn, the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy, and the Space Infrared Telescope.

The proposal to close three NASA centers while continuing full funding for the Space Shuttle and space station, which would be impossible, indicates that this is not a serious proposal but a red alert to get people's attention. A staffer for the Democrats on the House Science Committee believes that the budget the subcommit-

tee released is a political document, and said that throwing out this kind of wild proposal indicates that we are starting to see a breakdown in what is predictable. The Science Committee has not yet authorized the FY 96 NASA budget; the Senate will probably not act on it until after the August recess.

Helms seeks cut in AIDS treatment funding

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) wants to reduce funding for the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Emergency Resources Act because it was, according to him, homosexuals' "deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct" that caused AIDS, he told the *New York Times* in early July.

Helms's statements raised an outcry—undoubtedly foreseen by Helms, perhaps to force Republican Presidential hopefuls to kowtow to the Radical Right on this issue. Helms also complained that too many federal dollars went to AIDS patients and research, to the detriment of research into other diseases.

The act, which provides \$624 million in funding this year, is due to expire in September unless Congress reauthorizes it. It had bipartisan support when passed last year, with Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) co-sponsoring the legislation. The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee has unanimously approved the act's reauthorization, but the House Commerce Committee has yet to act.

President Clinton reacted immediately in a speech to students at Georgetown University on July 6, pointing out that AIDS funding was less than one-third of that for cancer and less than one-sixth of that for heart dis-

ease. He explained the many different ways that people have acquired AIDS, many of them by freak accidents or by blood transfusions. He added that "the gay people who have AIDS are still our sons, our brothers, our cousins, our citizens. They're Americans, too. They're obeying the law and working hard. They're entitled to be treated like everybody else."

Supreme Court overturns black electoral district

In a decision that has enraged black legislators, the Supreme Court struck down on June 29 a congressional district in Georgia drawn specifically to elect a black to Congress. The court ruled that Georgia's 11th Congressional District is unconstitutional because it groups voters based predominantly on race. The district, represented by Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.), joins black metropolitan Atlanta with black rural communities 260 miles along the coast.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus said that the Supreme Court ruling puts all minority districts at risk and could reshape congressional districting maps across the country. "Any district that has been drawn or would be drawn to elect blacks in Congress would and could be challenged," said Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.). There is similar case before the Supreme Court in the fall affecting the district of Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Tex.).

Not all Democrats saw the developments as pessimistically. "I am an optimist," Abigail Thornstrom, author of *Who's Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights*, told the *Washington Times*. "If one puts together the fact that the overwhelming majority of black may-

ors have been elected from minority-black cities, if you keep in mind that Colin Powell is the most wanted political candidate in American today, blacks will pull together bi-racial coalitions and will continue to be elected."

Sen. D'Amato tries to revive Whitewater

The Special Committee on Whitewater Development Corporation and Related Matters will begin hearings on July 18, in an attempt to revive the allegations of financial irregularities in the real estate dealings in Arkansas involving the Clintons. The committee will hold hearings on the related matter of what happened, if anything, to the papers of the late White House Deputy Counsel Vincent W. Foster.

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), himself often the subject of investigation for shady financial dealings, has ironically become the Republican point-man for the investigation. D'Amato will chair the special Senate Whitewater panel.

Allegations of foul play have been trumpeted in full-page newspaper ads, a campaign that has been heavily bankrolled by Richard Mellon Scaife. The allegations claim that Whitewater-related documents that were held by Foster as President Clinton's personal attorney were removed and turned over to David Kendall, who had become the Clintons' personal attorney. Although a special prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, a key Bush-league operative, has been investigating the Whitewater allegations for months without turning up anything of substance, the D'Amato hearings are intended to keep the allegations in the news—perhaps all the way to the 1996 election.

The Special Whitewater Committee was created by a 96-3 vote in the Senate, and has been allotted a \$950,000 budget, to last through February. House Banking Committee Chairman Jim Leach (R-Ia.) will start his own hearings on Aug. 7.

GOPers tell Clinton: Go to IMF for aid to Mexico

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) delivered a letter to Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin on July 5, in which they said they are "not aware of any 'emergencies' or 'contingencies' that would justify the release of additional U.S. funds to supporting the Mexican peso." Rubin had announced plans the previous week to release another \$2.5 billion to Mexico in addition to the \$10 billion in loan guarantees and other financial aid pledges since February. The senators urged the administration to seek funds from the International Monetary Fund, the Bank of International Settlements, and other international sources before using more U.S. funds.

At the outbreak of the Mexican peso crisis, President Clinton, in opposition to a Republican-dominated Congress that was unwilling to appropriate funds to assist Mexico, turned to the Equalization Fund for loan guarantees for Mexico.

The IMF agreed to a Mexican bailout during the so-called peso crisis only on condition that the United States shell out a good portion of the funding. Since then the issue of debt moratorium, in contrast to a "bailout," has gained widespread support in Mexico and throughout Ibero-America, with key religious leaders also giving their support to the idea.