

Whitewater hearings degrade U.S. Senate

by Edward Spannaus

While the world financial system careens toward collapse, the Committee on Banking of the United States Senate seems to have nothing better to do with its time than to occupy its members with the most trivial and irrelevant minutiae related to the so-called Whitewater scandal. As of this writing, the Senate Special Whitewater Committee (consisting of the Banking Committee and the two ranking members of the Judiciary Committee) is in its seventh day of hearings—or, one might better say, in their seventh day of disgracing the United States Senate.

The ostensible purpose of the hearings is to investigate what happened to Whitewater-related documents in the office of White House aide Vincent Foster after Foster was found dead on July 21, 1993. However, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and his cronies have made it clear from the beginning that their real purpose is to try and show that President Clinton and especially First Lady Hillary Clinton were trying to hide evidence about Whitewater. In his opening statement on July 18, Sen. Rod Grams (R-Minn.) predicted that the hearings over the next three weeks "will unmask a side of government we don't like to see: arrogance, abuse of power, obstruction of justice, lack of accountability to the people."

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) noted at the outset that the first round of hearings, conducted a year ago, had determined that Foster's death was indeed a suicide. "Now, after millions of dollars, thousands of hours of special prosecutor interrogation and thousands of hours of FBI inquiries and hundreds of FBI agents, hundreds of news stories and investigations, we are about to examine the second phase of events, the handling of documents," Kerry continued. "Clearly the first round of hearings titillated and provided opportunity for the political joke and rumor mill, conspiratorialists were served up a full plate of fare for every paranoid theory imaginable to take flight," and, he added, "I have no doubt that the next days will serve as more grist for the mill."

The focus of the hearings is whether White House officials prevented investigators from obtaining access to documents in Foster's office. The U.S. Park Police, who had jurisdiction over the case because Foster's body was found in Fort Marcy Park near Washington, were not looking for Whitewater documents. All the Park Police were interested in, was whether or not a suicide note could be found.

But, with the way Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.) and

some of the Republicans are conducting themselves in the hearings, one would think that the U.S. Park Police had marched into Foster's office with a court order demanding every document concerning Whitewater (which, at last report, is not located in a U.S. National Park), and that White House officials had suddenly all turned into Ollie Norths, frantically hiding and shredding documents.

Evans-Pritchard complains

A useful indication of the direction of the hearings came from Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, one of the chief promoters of Whitewater allegations against President Clinton, in the London *Sunday Telegraph* on July 23.

"The Waco and Whitewater hearings in Congress have failed to inflict any serious damage on the Clinton presidency," Pritchard complained. He warned that if things were to continue this way during the coming week's sessions, the Republicans "will have a major fiasco on their hands. And it serves them right."

Among his complaints is that the Republicans are focusing on the wrong issues. Pritchard, who has devoted countless articles to Whitewater, insists that the GOP is on a wild-goose chase, by focusing on the link between Foster and Whitewater, rather than showing that Foster was the victim of murder, not suicide. "Whitewater is not important (repeat after me a thousand times)," shouts Pritchard. "It is a decoy, a distraction, nonsense."

One explanation for the bizarre behavior of D'Amato and his cronies might be found in a *Wall Street Journal* story from last Feb. 22, entitled "Capital Secret: There May Be Less To Whitewater Case Than Meets the Eye." The article warned that "many of the biggest Whitewater headlines appear to be heading toward the cutting-room floor," and reported that some of the juiciest Whitewater allegations, such as Hillary's commodities profits or the shredding of mysterious documents, "have been all but discarded by criminal investigators."

In fact, the article reviewed nine different areas of investigation, including Whitewater-Madison, campaign loans, the Foster case, and document shredding, and showed that in every single area, there was either no evidence of criminal wrongdoing, or if there were any possible evidence, that the statute of limitations had already expired. Lesser figures might go to jail on white-collar charges, but there was almost no one who believed any longer that Whitewater would ensnare the Clintons in criminal charges.

The only route that investigators could take, suggested the *Journal*, would be to try and come up with a "coverup case" charging obstruction of justice. It asserted that Whitewater special prosecutor Kenneth Starr was trying to figure out if he could cook up something around the removal of documents from Foster's office after his death. D'Amato and gang seem to have taken the *Wall Street Journal's* proposal quite seriously.