

Congress completes its shameless Waco coverup

by Leo F. Scanlon

Attorney General Janet Reno was the final witness to testify on Aug. 1 before the joint hearing of the Crime Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee and the National Security, International Affairs and Criminal Justice Subcommittee of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, and, with her remarks, the "Review of the Siege of Branch Davidians' Compound in Waco, Texas" was mercifully brought to a close.

The results of the hearing were so disgraceful that Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) announced that the Senate will reconsider its plans to hold a similar inquiry. Even Rush Limbaugh was left cringing at Rep. William Zeliff's (R-N.H.) clownish attacks on the Clinton administration.

On the Sunday before the final days of testimony, July 30, Zeliff appeared on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press" with the accusation that he possessed documents which would show the President to have been responsible for the final assault on the Mt. Carmel compound, and implied that the evidence would prove President Clinton to have been criminally negligent and blameful for the outcome of the siege. The charge, not surprisingly, proved hollow. The "evidence" was nothing more than internal memos among members of the transition team who were attempting to ensure that the Bush administration officials who began the confrontation with Branch Davidian leader David Koresh would not precipitate any actions without informing the Clinton White House.

The ham-handed stunt was reported to have been the "trump card" held from the outset by Paul McNulty, the spokesman for former U.S. Attorney General William Barr, who was directing the work of the Republican Judiciary Committee staff under Rep. Bill McCollum (R-Fla.).

However, Zeliff's partisan attacks on the President blew up in his face. On the NBC-TV broadcast, even Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), another member of the Waco panel, who had consistently abetted the coverup by steering the hearings away from any area that might prove damaging to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) or the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), was able to drive the point home that Zeliff had turned the Waco proceedings into a Clinton-bashing side-show.

Zeliff's TV sound-byte assault on the White House proved to be the perfect foil for Attorney General Reno. She responded to Zeliff's charges with a lecture on the structure

of government, pointing out to him that the actions of the Justice Department in this situation were "quasi-judicial" and not subject to review by the Executive branch: It is not the President who enforces the law. She took full responsibility for the actions of the FBI, and presented a defense of each of the decisions which her administration made, based on the information given to her by the officials who had conceived the operation initially. Neither the Attorney General nor the Waco panel attempted to probe deeper into the actions of the career bureaucrats who were the AG's sole sources of information about the status of the Branch Davidian siege.

The administration's opponents were left with nothing to say, and not because the Attorney General's version of events was the last word on the issue. The committee, especially the Republican majority members, had no response to her argument, because they never intended to question the motives and methods of the officials who set the confrontation with Koresh into motion in the first place.

The method of a coverup

Edgar Allan Poe demonstrated that there is no better way to lose sight of the truth, than to bury it in a mass of "facts." The Clinton administration, which had nothing to hide from the committee, supplied every "fact" the committee asked for, and answered fully every question put to it. Yet the result of the investigation can only be judged a coverup.

For one thing, no member of the congressional panel can legitimately claim that they did not know about the role of the ADL, CAN, Mark Richard, John Keeney (the two powerful Deputy Assistant Attorneys General in the Criminal Division who had responsibility for every facet of the DOJ involvement at Waco), or the FBI's Larry Potts in the Waco fiasco. Weeks before the hearings, every member of the committee received detailed information from *EIR*, including copies of the 32-page dossier on DOJ corruption that appeared in the magazine's June 30 issue. All of the key staffers on both the Judiciary and Government Reform and Oversight subcommittees that co-sponsored the ten days of hearings also received the material. A spokeswoman for the Schiller Institute, Dr. Deborah Freeman, had been originally scheduled to testify at the hearings as part of a panel of auxiliary experts; her written testimony contained even further details of the broad pattern of DOJ corruption, and collusion with the ADL and CAN.

In short, the Republican-orchestrated coverup of the Waco tragedy was no mere blunder or failure to adequately prepare. It was a willful effort to bury the Waco massacre under partisan rhetoric, leaving the corrupt permanent Justice Department structure fully intact.

The danger now is that this travesty will continue through the next round of hearings which the Congress is planning to hold into the Randy Weaver case and the so-called militia movement, which Reps. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) are now preparing.