

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Term limits resolution voted down in Senate

On Oct. 17, the Senate tabled, by a vote of 49-45, a resolution by John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) calling on the Senate to pass a constitutional amendment limiting the number of terms members of Congress can serve.

Ashcroft said that his resolution, which he introduced as an amendment to the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, was "a straightforward statement of the intention and sentiment, which I believe the American people have as their agenda, for reform, and I believe that we should advance that agenda in accordance with their clear mandate, last fall."

Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) ridiculed term limits, saying that the most effective term limitation on members of Congress is the American voter. "They, the voters," he said, "alone pick and choose whom they wish to have represent them. They alone, not some arbitrary calendar, determine who will serve in this body, and no constitutional amendment, no matter how well intentioned, can improve upon that situation."

Rockefeller threatens committee shutdown

Saying that he had "seen enough," Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) told the Senate on Oct. 18 that he would put in an objection to meetings of the Senate Finance Committee "every day," that would prevent the committee from meeting after 2 p.m. on any day that the Senate is in session.

"This new Republican leadership," he said, "will go to any length to seize the crown jewel of their Contract [with America]," the \$245 billion in tax cuts, "but at what cost? At whose

expense? Every day their answer becomes more savage. Pilfering school lunch monies, turning four-year-olds away from Head Start classes, eliminating standards for screening and testing of childhood diseases."

Rockefeller particularly attacked GOP Medicare proposals, accusing Republicans of "turning their backs on the elderly." He said that the final straw leading to his action was a new provision, "added to this long list of atrocities" in the reconciliation bill, "to unravel" health benefits for retired coal miners. He described this group of retired coal miners, numbering 92,000, as having survived all the hazards of mining, "but they may not survive this Republican Congress, and I am sad to say, there is probably more to come."

White House security too costly, says Grams

Rod Grams (R-Minn.) took to the floor of the Senate on Oct. 18 to complain that the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House is too costly, both in monetary terms and in terms of public access. The call comes as the United States, and the White House in particular, is facing increasing threats from terrorist forces nurtured by the British monarchy.

Grams described the security measures for invited guests entering the White House grounds as reflecting a "bunker mentality." He said, "I think it is safe to say that very few visitors feel at home these days at the White House. The openness is gone. It has all been replaced by intimidation and fear."

Grams described the monetary costs of the closing, including the impact on traffic, the loss of parking rev-

enues for the District of Columbia, and the costs of the "beautification plan" for the closed section of roadway. He called on his colleagues to join him in denouncing "the assault on our freedoms being undertaken on Pennsylvania Avenue. . . . President Clinton has gone too far, but it is not too late to halt his efforts to close off the people's house on America's Main Street from the people themselves. I urge that we take action now, before a single spadeful of earth is turned."

Congressmen disagree on Million Man March

On Oct. 17, two members of Congress spoke on the House floor on the Million Man March, and their viewpoints diverged significantly.

James Traficant (D-Ohio) praised the march, in a one-minute speech. "I attended the Million Man March," he said, "I thought it was the right thing to do." He said that "the message was powerful. The themes were responsible: self-responsibility, economic independence, morality, love, parenthood. Those are good messages for all America." He concluded that "there is reality here. The pope and Billy Graham are great human beings, but the pope and Billy Graham and all the religious leaders of the world will not solve the race problem in America. It is going to, in fact, require the help of all people. Congress should join in and commend that march. It was good for the country."

Major Owens (D-N.Y.), in a convoluted 60-minute speech, went to great lengths to explain that he could not support the march and that he doesn't regret that decision now. He claimed that the marchers "did not have a political agenda" or "an agenda

to support Minister Louis Farrakhan in his endeavors." Owens said he could not participate, "because I knew very well the danger of supporting an activity which is led by a minister, Louis Farrakhan, who refuses, basically, to change his agenda." He qualified that by saying how "happy and optimistic" he was about the moderate and conciliatory tone of the statement that Farrakhan made.

However, Owen made a useful comment about the programmatic content of the march. His speech was ostensibly about Medicare and Medicaid, which, he said, "are not individual responsibilities. . . . You cannot have your family taken care of, with respect to health care, by yourself, no matter how much you reform and change your own lifestyle." He criticized the marchers for ignoring the Medicare and Medicaid "emergencies," and for not understanding "that the economy is shaped by forces that are beyond the control of individuals and families" and for not addressing the fact "that government policies at this point are at the root of the problems being faced by families and their inability to cope, in many cases."

Cuba 'liberty act' clears Senate

The Senate passed the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act on Oct. 19, after voting to shut off a Democratic filibuster the day before. The bill commits the United States to tighten the existing economic embargo against Cuba, and to support the transition to a post-Castro government that is "democratically elected."

The vote came after several amendments, which would have lifted some restrictions in the embargo cur-

rently in force, were defeated. One amendment, sponsored by Paul Simon (D-Ill.), would have allowed Americans to travel to Cuba legally. Simon said, "It is very interesting that in the Soviet Union we had this same question: Should we cut them off and isolate them, or should we have American visitors who go there and help to ameliorate their policy? We, fortunately, made the right decision that Americans could travel there."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) said Simon's amendment, which was tabled by a vote of 73-25, "undercuts the embargo that has been in effect for eight Presidents. Tourism will not change Castro . . . it will merely contribute to Castro's economic status a little bit."

Republican budget plan riddled with holes

June O'Niell, the director of the Congressional Budget Office, sent several letters to the Senate on CBO budget projections for the year 2002, based on this year's budget reconciliation bill. It became clear that Republican claims that their plan would balance the federal budget in seven years, are severely flawed.

O'Niell's first letter, on Oct. 18, was waved around on the floor of the Senate by Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.). In it, O'Niell said that the Republican budget plans would lead to a \$10 billion budget surplus in the year 2002, "if the President will just sign what we have done," Domenici claimed.

The following day, Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) reported that he and several other senators had asked for a clarification on that projection from the

CBO, and O'Niell sent back another letter reporting that, if Social Security and Postal Service surpluses are not included, the actual result for the year 2002 will be a \$98 billion deficit.

On Oct. 20, Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) reported that the CBO had said it made a mistake in calculating changes in the consumer price index, and the actual deficit for the year 2002 will be \$105 billion.

In an attempt to rebut Dorgan on Oct. 23, Domenici quoted from an editorial by columnist Charles Krauthammer, to the effect that not including the Social Security trust fund in the budget projections is a "fraudulent argument," even though the trust fund is excluded by the Congressional Budget Act of 1990. This caused Hollings to quip that Krauthammer was a psychiatrist "before he started spilling ink on the editorial page," and that this reminded him of the old saw that "a psychiatrist is the fellow who goes to the burlesque show to look at the audience."

Wolf goes on rampage against Croatia

On Oct. 18, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), who has often served as the point man in Congress for the British destabilization campaign against Sudan, turned his guns on Croatia. He accused the Croatians of committing genocide against Serbs in the recently liberated Krajina region, and cited reports of alleged atrocities by European Union monitors to justify his call for eliminating \$12 million in funding for the Croatian-American Enterprise Fund contained in the current Foreign Operations appropriations bill.

By approving the funding, "Congress would not only be turning our backs on genocide, we would be approving it," Wolf said.