

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Independent counsel sought for Gingrich

Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) called for an independent counsel to handle the ethics complaints against Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), on the House floor on Nov. 2. DeLauro said that the ethics panel's investigation makes the O.J. Simpson trial "look like swift justice." She said, "The complexity of the charges, coupled with the fact that they are leveled against the highest ranking member of the House, are two reasons why this inquiry has taken so long."

She concluded that "the appointment of an outside counsel is the only way to assure a fair, thorough, non-partisan investigation of the speaker. It is the only way to lift the ethical cloud that hangs over this House."

Republicans void their own rule to pass a bill

On Oct. 27, the House Republican leadership used a parliamentary maneuver to get past one of the rule changes that they made back in January, in order to pass the budget reconciliation bill. House Res. 245, the rule of debate under which the bill was considered, included a waiver of House Rule 21, which requires a three-fifths vote to pass a tax increase. The reconciliation bill includes a virtual repeal of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for the working poor, which, in practice, amounts to a tax increase.

According to the report of the Rules Committee, there is no tax increase in the bill, but the waiver was required "as a precautionary measure to avoid unnecessary points of order that might otherwise arise over confusion or misinterpretations of what is meant by an income tax increase."

The significance of this waiver did not escape the notice of Democrats.

Tony Beilenson (Calif.) pointed out that if the EITC reform in the bill is not a tax increase, as the Republicans maintain, "we see no reason for the protection this rule provides against the three-fifths vote requirement for a bill that raises income taxes."

After the resolution passed by a vote of 235-185, James Moran (D-Va.) inserted into the record a list of six provisions in the reconciliation bill that would be subject to the three-fifths rule, except for the waiver. "It is important to note," he said, "when the history of this Congress is written, the main theme will be about the majority's unrelenting attack on the poor and defenseless in our society, but a chapter, however, should be reserved for its hypocrisy."

Smith doing Wall Street's bidding on debt ceiling?

Nick Smith (R-Mich.) told the House on Nov. 1 that four people from Wall Street had visited members of Congress to tell them, "If you do not stick to your guns [on the balanced budget], you are going to see the stock market fall. You are going to see the bond market fall, and you are going to see more chaos than if you stick to your guns." He admitted, in response to questioning from Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) that, in fact, "we are trying to use the debt ceiling as leverage" to force President Clinton to meet GOP budget demands.

Smith revealed that the four individuals were Stanley Druckenmiller, of Soros Fund Management; Kenneth G. Langone, chairman of Invened Associates; James Capra; and Edward Hyman, whom Smith described as "the number one economist for each of the last 16 years."

The Nov. 6 *Wall Street Journal* reported that Druckenmiller told

members of Congress that "if a default was followed by entitlement reform, the markets would not only be forgiving, but you would have a new, lower level of interest rates." Langone and Druckenmiller signed an ad that appeared in the Sept. 26 *Washington Post* demanding a balanced budget agreement even at the risk of a Treasury default.

Smith, along with Chris Shays (R-Conn.), is the leader of 160 members of the House, including almost all of the freshmen, who have vowed not to vote for an increase in the debt ceiling unless President Clinton signs a budget that includes "a glide path to a balanced budget."

Robert Byrd blasts reconciliation process

Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), in remarks on the Senate floor on Nov. 3, blasted the budget reconciliation bill that was passed by the Senate a week earlier, and the process by which the Senate had only 20 hours of debate on a 1,949-page bill.

"Passing the reconciliation bill was like playing blind man's bluff at a blind man's ball," he said. "Not one senator really knew what he was voting on when he voted for that bill." He said that the bill itself "appears to be a repeat of Reaganomics," which he called a "failed economic policy" which the Senate has "embraced."

Byrd ridiculed the notion of balancing the budget while cutting taxes by \$245 billion, as well as the projections of the Congressional Budget Office. The CBO's deficit projections, he said, have been off by an average of \$45 billion a year over the last 15 years, "so we cannot believe, on the basis of CBO's projections, that the budget will be balanced in seven years. And just one recession will knock those projections into a cocked hat."

Specter seeks int'l criminal court

Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), in remarks on the floor of the Senate on Nov. 3, called for the formation of an international criminal court "to deal with hostage taking, terrorism, and drug dealing where we find that there are people in custody who they will not extradite to the United States," such as in Colombia.

"If there were an international criminal court," he said, "then I do believe there would be a tribunal set up where the political disadvantage of extraditing, say, to the United States, would not be present."

Specter's remarks were in the context of a request by the prosecutor in the International War Crimes tribunal dealing with Bosnia, to make the surrender of indicted suspects part of any peace accord.

Simpson introduces new immigration bill

Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) on Nov. 3 introduced a new immigration reform bill which incorporates some of the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform. One of the commission members, Harold Ezell, was a coauthor of California's Proposition 187 last year.

Simpson's bill is aimed not only at eliminating illegal immigration, but also drastically reducing legal immigration. He said, "The American people are increasingly troubled about the impact legal immigration is having on their country." He cited an article in the *American Enterprise* magazine which claimed that in polls taken since 1955, some 60% of Americans favor a reduction in legal immigration, while policy changes since then have increased immigration from 170,000 per year to over 900,000.

"The American people have become increasingly restless and dissatisfied at seeing their will ignored," said Simpson. "Proposition 187 may only be the first of many indicators of their real displeasure."

Three appropriations bills pass Congress

During the week of Oct. 30, the House and Senate finally completed action on three of 13 appropriations bills, Energy and Water Development, Transportation, and Legislative Branch Appropriations. President Clinton had earlier vetoed the legislative appropriations bill because he was angered that Congress acted in a timely fashion only to fund itself; it was the first to be sent to his desk. He is expected to sign all three when they get to his desk.

Meanwhile, other spending bills, including defense, the District of Columbia, foreign operations, and Labor-Health and Human Services, are stalled in conference over House-passed abortion riders.

Hatch says Clinton not jailing enough drug pushers

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) once again complained on the Senate floor on Nov. 2, that President Clinton has been "AWOL . . . in the war on drugs." However, his complaints focused on a supposed failure to put enough small fry behind bars.

Hatch referred to an unattributed statement in the Oct. 29 *New York Times*, which said that some federal prosecutors in Miami are not charging some crack cocaine suspects "because they believe the punishment they will face is unduly harsh." He called this

"troubling in light of the fact that federal drug prosecutions have slipped more than 12% since 1992, from 25,033 in 1992 to 21,905 in 1995."

Hatch also attacked the administration policy for focusing on hard-core drug addicts, "people who are very difficult to rehabilitate." Instead, he said, "our limited funds ought to be going to these first-time youthful offenders that we have a chance of rehabilitating." Not once did Hatch refer to the initiatives on drug-money laundering that the President announced in his address to the United Nations in October.

'English only' pushed in wake of Quebec vote

Rep. Toby Roth (R-Wisc.), on Oct. 31, cited the Quebec referendum in pushing a bill he is sponsoring to make English the official language of the United States. "Canada just narrowly avoided splitting in two over linguistic and cultural differences," he said. "Canada may yet split up and linguistic tensions there were not erased by the razor thin victory of unity."

Roth called Canada's example "a cautionary tale for the United States. "Within five years . . . one out of every seven Americans will not speak English. We have to make English our official language so we can keep one nation, one language, one people."

The following day, the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth, and Families, chaired by Randy Cunningham (R-Calif.), held a hearing on "English as the Common Language." Most of the witnesses, which included the chairman of the group U.S. English and a number of immigrants, endorsed making English the official language.