

## **Congressional Closeup** by Carl Osgood

### **Kennedy lambastes doctoring CPI figures**

On Jan. 4, Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), on the Senate floor, condemned proposed legislative changes in the way the Consumer Price Index is calculated. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that a 1% decrease in the change of the CPI would result in \$281 billion in deficit reduction over the next seven years. "Some may see this large sum as a magic bullet to balance the budget," said Kennedy, "but it is a bullet aimed at millions of Americans who need help the most, and who don't deserve this added pain. It makes no sense to fight hard to save Medicare and then attack Social Security."

"Legislating an arbitrary reduction in the CPI," Kennedy continued, "would clearly break the compact of Social Security. . . . An essential part of that compact is a fair Social Security COLA [Cost of Living Adjustment] so that senior citizens can be sure that their hard-earned Social Security benefits will not be eaten away by inflation."

### **Aristide role in Haitian violence, House told**

The State Department's special coordinator for Haiti, Amb. James Dobbins, told the House International Relations Committee on Jan. 4 that "there've been some two dozen murders committed in Haiti since October 1994 . . . which fall in the category of possible political or revenge killings, the most prominent of which was the murder of Mireille Bertin on March 28, 1995." He said that the U.S. government has "maintained an intense dialogue with President Aristide regarding the Bertin investigation, other potential political murders, possible

connection among these killings, possible involvement of individuals in official positions with such activities."

Dobbins admitted, under questioning from committee Chairman Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.), that a prime suspect in the Bertin murder is Aristide's interior minister. He also admitted, "We were disappointed with the level of cooperation we received" from the Aristide government, and that this issue was raised "repeatedly" with Aristide himself.

Gilman and Dan Burton (R-Ind.) pursued their questioning as if the Clinton administration was conspiring to hide these problems from Congress. Gilman said in his opening statement that "this hearing is less about Haiti and more about the responsibility of our State Department to adequately and accurately respond to congressional queries."

### **House votes vacation, amid continued shutdown**

The House voted 224-190 on Jan. 5 to go on vacation while leaving parts of the government still without operating funds. The resolution recesses the House for three-day periods, subject to the call of the chair, until Jan. 23, just before President Clinton's State of the Union address. The resolution also provides that the Speaker may recall the House into session on one day's notice if certain conditions are met, meaning, if President Clinton agrees to the House Republicans' budget demands.

The House voted earlier to fund the payrolls of furloughed federal employees and to provide operating funds to certain targeted agencies and programs, those that were generating the most constituent complaints because of the shutdown.

Democrats denounced the resolution as "completely irresponsible." David Obey (D-Wisc.) said, "What this resolution really says is that the Congress will be allowed to get out of town, until the 25th, and the government will be reopened partially during that time period. Then the day after Congress gets back to town, the government shuts down again, at least those portions that have been opened up."

Porter Goss (R-Fla.) revealed the blackmail nature of the Republican strategy. "This is the vote," he said, "that gives us the key to getting to that clean, clear, continuing resolution that I keep hearing about from the other side. This is the vote that smooths the pathway to get us to that chance."

### **Myers: 'No shutdown if I were chairman'**

Veteran Rep. John Myers (R-Ind.) told the Indianapolis *Star Tribune* on Jan. 1 that "we wouldn't be in the position [government shutdown] that we are today if I had been chairman of the Appropriations Committee. We would have had this thing finished and been out of here. . . . It used to be that there was a camaraderie that crossed party lines. . . . Now they go for the jugular." He complained that House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) "is always willing to have a fight, just to win the issue."

Myers, who heads a panel in charge of the House gym, decided to close it when the government shut down, but was overruled by Gingrich. Myers observed, "Gingrich runs every other committee up here. He might as well run that one, too."

Myers, in his 15th term, was passed over as chairman of the Appropriations Committee by Gingrich, in

favor of budget cutter Bob Livingston (R-La.), because Myers works through bipartisan consensus on using government spending to promote economic development and the general welfare.

### **Three Clinton vetoes sustained by House**

On Jan. 3, the House failed to override President Clinton's vetoes of the Defense authorization bill and the Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary appropriations bill. On Jan. 4, it failed to override Clinton's veto of the Interior appropriations bill.

The debate on the Defense authorization bill centered on its missile defense provisions. Clinton said in his Dec. 28 veto message that the bill forces "an unwarranted deployment decision, now," in the absence of a credible threat, and would "force us to commit prematurely to a specific technological option" as well as "jeopardize Russian implementation of the START I treaty and ratification of START II."

House National Security Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-S.C.) claimed that the missile defense system called for in the bill "would be consistent with the ABM Treaty and, contrary to the wild assertions of it costing tens of billions of dollars, could be operational for a fraction of the costs based on the Pentagon's own estimates."

Harold Rogers (R-Ky.), chairman of the Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Appropriations subcommittee, called the vote on that bill "a real deal" to put the employees of those departments back to work. He said that the reason those workers are not at work is that "the President chose to lay them off."

Alan Mollohan (D-W.V.) suggest-

ed instead that "the most constructive thing to be doing now is working out our differences on this bill in a rational way, without the government shut-down being used by the majority . . . as leverage in these policy debates. Indeed, I think there is a pretty clear analogy between just good old hostage taking and the strategy being pursued by the majority."

In the debate on the Interior appropriations bill, Republicans invoked their balanced budget rhetoric, while the Democrats fell back on fraudulent environmentalist arguments. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) used a scare story appearing in the Jan. 4 *New York Times*, which reported on British figures claiming to show that the last five years, globally, have been the warmest on record, to argue against a rider terminating energy efficiency programs. "Why would we raise the cost of energy to our constituents to allow for greater pollution of their environment and an increase in global warming?" he asked.

### **GOP freshmen the 'Red Guard,' says German paper**

The German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, on Jan. 5, described the anti-compromise House Republicans, primarily the 73 GOP freshmen, as the "Red Guard," referring to Mao Zedong's cultural revolution. The paper quoted freshman John Shadegg (R-Ariz.) as saying, during the debate on the federal budget, "To hell with the future, we'll stick to our sacred principles."

Their preferred leader isn't even Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), but Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), the most radical of the Mont Pelerinites in the House. Gingrich is considered too prone to cut a deal with President Clin-

ton on the budget, although on conditions different from those of Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.).

The paper wrote that Gingrich may be worried about getting reelected. The "Red Guard," on the other hand, is thinking neither of their own, nor of the nation's future, but, rather, wants to shut down the government at all costs.

### **Livingston says bigger NATO good for Russia**

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) told a conference on the legacy of the Marshall Plan on Jan. 10, that NATO should be expanded in order to solidify "peace and security in both the new Europe and its environs." He said that a "united, vibrant NATO is as important today as it was at its founding. . . . NATO has succeeded and what was the Soviet empire is no more, but we are not necessarily secure in the future and we should not disband."

NATO is a defensive alliance which has no designs on Russia, he said. "There is absolutely no political desire to represent or become such a threat," he said. "And secondly, NATO's military forces are wholly incapable of any offensive actions against Russia. If there's one enduring military lesson from this millennium, it should be that Russia and its people together represent an impregnable fortress against hostile forces, which there are none in the West. Moreover, I'm convinced that a democratic Russia will actually benefit by a strong but benign NATO located on its western borders. . . ."

"Security challenges for Russia in the future may lie in the east and south, not to the west. Europe offers only opportunity, economic growth, and integration, not a threat."