

Conservative Revolution is placed on hold

by Carl Osgood

James Carville's famous line from the 1992 Presidential campaign, "It's the economy, stupid," could be what the Republican Party has discovered since Pat Buchanan's upset victory in the New Hampshire primary on Feb. 20. That, combined with the bloody nose that congressional Republicans received in their confrontation with President Clinton over the budget, has forced them to abandon, at least temporarily, the blackmail strategy they had pursued throughout 1995, in order to force through their Conservative Revolution agenda.

A signal of the dilemma the Conservative Revolution finds itself in, was sent by Arianna Huffington, one of House Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-Ga.) gurus, during a forum at the American Enterprise Institute on Feb. 26. She sadly reported that we must see the current circumstance as like what happens at an airport under construction: there is a sign that says, "Service area closed for repairs." Likewise, "We must say that the Conservative Revolution is suspended, for the time being." She pleaded with the audience to help her move the unresponsive population to support drastic cuts in welfare, coupled with personal philanthropy and "spirituality."

A similar signal came from the London *Economist*. The lead editorial of its Feb. 24-March 1 issue, under a cover picture of Pat Buchanan labeled "Voice of America?" all but admits that the Buchanan successes in the early primaries have merely served to open up the carefully concealed ideological divisions within Republican ranks. "Mr. Buchanan has opened with axe blows the cracks which the Republican Party, for eight years, has been delicately papering over. Is the party the voice of the religious right, stoutly opposed to abortion, homosexuality, and all that could be called liberal? Or can it speak for the confused but tolerant majority? Is it the party of free trade or tariffs? Internationalist, or vowing to keep American boys and American aid safely at home? And, most important of all, is it a forward looking party of reform, limited government, and faith in the market, or one that, in the name of conservatism, demands a stronger and more intrusive State?"

On March 6, an article by Stephane Marchand in the French daily *Le Figaro* was even more pungent in its evaluation of the current situation. "The Conservative Revolution is perhaps in the process of devouring its children, less than

two years after its polemics about bringing down the 'FDR State' had seemingly triumphed politically in the U.S.," he wrote. Marchand picked up on Buchanan's "conservatism of the heart," centered around "protectionism," and quoted Buchanan on his dream of a "Republican Party attentive to workers whose standard of living has fallen."

Republicans make concessions

All of these signals were followed by open concessions to President Clinton on the part of congressional Republicans. As of this writing, the House is going ahead with both a temporary debt limit bill to raise the public debt ceiling until March 29, and an omnibus spending resolution that will keep the remaining departments of government that still lack their annual appropriations funding, operating until Sept. 30, 1996, the end of the current fiscal year.

House Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-Tex.) told reporters on March 5 that "the polls said we've gone too far by shutting down the government and by bickering and fighting amongst ourselves. They wish that we could get something done. That's what I read in the polls."

The House leadership has also backed down on its threat to attach the welfare and Medicaid reform proposal made by the National Governors Association, to the short-term debt-limit bill. They dropped the plan because they feared they wouldn't have enough Republican votes to pass it. Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) told the *Washington Post* on March 5, "I don't think there's going to be anything on the debt limit legislation." Similarly, House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) added, "When the underlying premise is we will not default, then we have some limits on what we can put in there."

The omnibus spending resolution is likely to be passed with several billion dollars in funds that had been cut by the previous continuing resolution, although probably not the full \$8 billion that the Clinton administration had asked for. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) said on March 1 that the House will probably approve \$4.5 billion of the President's request. The Senate Appropriations Committee voted, on March 6, to restore funding to many of President Clinton's favored programs, including \$975 million for the "cops on the beat" program, \$383 million for the national service corps, and \$240 million for safe drinking water.

None of this means, however, that the Conservative Revolution has abandoned its agenda. In a speech to the Association of Advanced Underwriters on March 6, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) announced an agenda for his committee that is nothing more than a continuation of the "Contract on America." House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) suggested that the Republicans will be sending their agenda to Clinton in bits and pieces, rather than in the 1,300-page monster bills he's been vetoing. "We now move what we can, when we can," Armey said.