

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Gingrich's ethics again raised on House floor

House Majority Leader Richard Armey (R-Tex.) became enraged on June 26, in response to a series of one-minute speeches by Democrats expressing frustration with the slow pace of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (the ethics committee) investigation of complaints against Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). The speeches were inspired by a report in the *Los Angeles Times* that GOPAC, a Gingrich-run operation, ran a \$6 million fraud scheme to use tax-exempt charities to raise money for recruiting Republican congressional candidates.

Ron Klink (D-Pa.) said the panel "had knowledge of this evidence, in this case, for many months, and they have not taken action." Harold Volkmer (D-Mo.) called the panel's inaction "a cover-up."

Armey demanded an apology on behalf of the members of the ethics committee. "Never have I seen so much disdain and lack of regard and appreciation for those 10 among us who would take on the toughest job we have to do," he whined.

Justifiably, the Democrats continued, with seven more one-minute speeches. Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.) told Armey that "the only apology that is due in this House is one from him [Armey] for obstructing the investigation which ought to be occurring." Others called for the ethics panel to refer the latest charges to the special counsel investigating earlier complaints against Gingrich.

The Democrats were interrupted by a ruling from Speaker pro tem Enid Greene (formerly Waldholtz) (R-Utah) that they were out of order, because neither a report from the ethics committee nor a privileged resolution was before the House for consideration.

The following day, Harry John-

ston (D-Fla.) brought a privileged resolution to the floor calling on the ethics panel to immediately refer all remaining charges against Gingrich to the special counsel. Armey moved to table the resolution without debate, as he has done on two previous occasions, and the motion was upheld by a vote of 229-170.

Verbal fracas disrupts business of the House

A verbal brawl broke out on the House floor on June 27, during debate on the resolution that provided for the Congress to adjourn for the week of July 4. The substance of the debate, as raised by the Democrats, was that House rules require that the House pass all 13 Appropriations bills before adjourning for the holiday. Thus far, only six have been passed.

Freshman J.D. Hayworth (R-Ariz.) started by heckling David Obey (D-Wisc.). Obey responded, "Every time somebody says something you don't like, you open your mouth and you start shouting from your seat. You are one of the most impolite members I have ever seen in my service in this House." Hayworth called Obey's words "a personal attack" and "grossly unfair," and demanded that Obey's words be stricken from the record and that he be prohibited from the floor for the rest of the evening except to vote.

Democrats then demanded a ruling from Speaker pro tem Ray LaHood (R-Ill.) that Hayworth was being disrespectful, and Republicans demanded that Obey apologize to Hayworth for calling him "impolite." Obey replied, "I would be happy to apologize to the gentleman for calling him impolite, if the gentleman would have apologized for interrupting me while I was speak-

ing." Hayworth declined to do so.

Order was restored when Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) suggested that both men apologize to each other. Hyde said that there was still the transportation appropriations bill to come up, and "the gentleman from Wisconsin [Obey] is essential if we are going to do the transportation bill this evening."

Kohl tries again on campaign finance reform

Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.) introduced a bill on June 25 to set up a campaign finance reform commission to propose "comprehensive campaign finance reform." The proposals of the commission would be subject to an up or down vote of the Congress without amendments being permitted.

Kohl's proposal came on the heels of the collapse of the latest campaign finance reform bill, which died when a vote earlier in the day to end a Republican filibuster failed to secure 60 votes.

Kohl said he specifically modeled his proposal on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, created at the end of the 1980s, which closed hundreds of U.S. military installations without regard to the political and economic effects. Kohl said that the creation of such a commission "would be a concrete sign to the American public that Congress is serious about reforming our election laws."

Michigan welfare reform waiver bill introduced

Inspired by the House passage of a waiver bill for Wisconsin's welfare reform plans a few weeks ago, Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.) and Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.) introduced a

similar bill on behalf of Michigan's "To Strengthen Michigan Families" welfare reform project on June 27.

Abraham, in remarks on the Senate floor, effusively praised Michigan's plan, which is similar in many respects to the Wisconsin plan, and bragged how it has reduced Michigan's welfare caseload by 45,000 since September 1992, and required waivers from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to do so. He provided no information about what has happened to those families and individuals forced off welfare.

Michigan's latest package of reforms requires 76 waivers, but Spencer complained that "there is tremendous concern as to how long it will likely take for all of Michigan's waivers to become approved, if they ever are all approved."

Abraham's bill would bypass this process and allow Michigan to implement its reforms. "The latest round of reforms," he claimed, "follows in the tradition of tough but compassionate welfare policies that we in Michigan started in 1992. The people of Michigan deserve to be allowed to move forward expeditiously with these latest reform initiatives."

GOPers introduce second 'Contract on America'

On June 25, Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) and House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) introduced legislation to begin implementation of a program called "The Project for American Renewal." The program is a continuation of the drive begun under the Contract with America to replace the federal government's role in social welfare policy with charities. Other parts of the program come under the rubrics of "community empower-

ment," and "fathering, mentoring, and family."

Kasich said, in describing the program, that "we must realize that solutions to problems facing our country do not lie in budget numbers or centralized bureaucracies. Instead, solutions will grow from the power of individuals, families, and groups in their own neighborhoods and communities." Coats indicated that he didn't think this program would be taken up this year, but hoped that "we can seriously address this issue in the next Congress."

NASA funding survives House budget debate

The NASA budget survived two attempts to transfer part of its funding to low-income housing and homeless programs run by the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, as the House passed the Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies appropriations bill on June 26. The amendments, sponsored by Joseph Kennedy (D-Mass.), would have transferred almost \$500 million out of NASA's human space flight account.

Kennedy said that the bill "devastates" assisted housing programs. "We are essentially saying to the poor, whose numbers are growing, whose housing needs are critical, we no longer are providing shelters to some of the most vulnerable people in this society."

George Brown (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the Science Committee, did not oppose Kennedy's amendments so much as the process by which housing programs for the poor were being pitted against the space program. He said that what the supporters of the Kennedy amendments were try-

ing to accomplish, "is impossible to achieve within the narrow scope of this one appropriation bill."

The fundamental problem, Brown said, is that "the American economic system has really failed in terms of supporting the kind of economy that provides good jobs, the hopes of a career, the opportunity for advancement and progress that we would like to provide. It is my very honest conviction that until we can establish the basis for a growing, productive, peacetime economy, we are going to continue to suffer and see the deterioration of our cities, the failure to provide to the poor, a decreasing ability to provide good education to the people of this country." Brown suggested that, as an immediate alternative, a 1% cut in the Defense Department budget, which is \$12 billion over the Clinton administration's request, "is a much more reasonable way to set our priorities straight."

China MFN trade status gets go-ahead in House

On June 27, the House defeated, by a vote of 286-141, a joint resolution which would have disapproved the renewal of most favored nation trade status for China. The debate revolved on whether trading relations with China were in the best interests of the United States in view of the many issues of disagreement between the two nations, especially on human rights, Taiwan, and weapons proliferation.

The House later passed, by a vote of 411-7, a resolution calling on the International Relations, National Security, Ways and Means, and Banking committees to hold hearings on all these issues and, if appropriate, report legislation to the House not later than Sept. 30.