

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood and Suzanne Rose

Gingrich ethics report stays on front burner

On Sept. 12, a chorus of Democratic leaders went on the House floor to demand the release of the 200-page report which special counsel James Cole submitted at the conclusion of his investigation of GOPAC, Newt Gingrich's political action committee, in response to complaints filed with the ethics panel. The Democrats, led by Minority Whip David Bonior (Mich.), quoted the 1989 statement made by Gingrich, demanding the release of the special counsel report on former Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.), which forced his resignation. Bonior was joined by Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), John Lewis (D-Ga.), Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.), and George Miller (D-Calif.). A ruckus ensued, and the microphones were cut off.

Bonior, at a press conference following the confrontation, said, "The ethics committee has had [Cole's] report for exactly one month now, but we still don't know what the report says, because the committee refuses to act on it and refuses to make it public. Newt Gingrich has been protected for nearly two years. And now that the outside counsel has submitted an extensive report of his investigation into Newt Gingrich's violations of tax law, tax fraud, corruption, and abuse of power, the committee is trying to keep it secret. This is a shameful abuse of power. If this report cleared the Speaker's name, don't you think it would have been released in a heartbeat? Is this report so damaging to Newt Gingrich that the Ethics Committee has to keep it secret?"

Bonior continued, "Now, during the investigation of another Speaker seven years ago, Newt Gingrich himself said, 'I think it is vital that we establish as a Congress our commitment to publish that report and to release those documents, so the country can

judge whether or not the man second in line to be President, the Speaker of the House, should be in that position.' Well, shouldn't that same standard apply to Speaker Gingrich himself? . . . The strategy of the ethics committee is to keep this report hidden until Congress adjourns, so the American people never see it. But we will not let that happen."

Colombian cops, soldiers seek help against drugs

The head of Colombia's anti-narcotics section of the National Police, and the Army head of the joint police-military "search bloc" against the Cali Cartel, testified Sept. 11 before a hearing of the U.S. House subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, chaired by Dan Burton (R-Ind.), on why more effective technology and weaponry should be made available to Colombia's anti-drug war.

In addition to noticeable contempt shown to the Army colonel by Burton, the emphasis of Burton, as well as several other committee members, was on "preserving democracy" and "fighting human rights abuse" by the military, rather than stopping the narco-terrorist insurgency. Both the committee members and Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gelbard expressed their "serious concern" that proposed reforms to the Colombian Constitution, which would give the military back some of its legal weaponry against the enemy, would "roll back" the concept of civilian control of the military. In sharp contrast, the Colombian police and Army colonels reiterated that Colombia is in a battle for survival against a narco-terrorist threat which must be overcome at all cost.

At one point, the Colombians were baited by Robert Menendez (D-N.J.).

"Why should the U.S. give lethal weaponry to the military, which will use it for counterinsurgency abuse against opposition groups?" he asked. The police colonel retorted that without the Army, the war on drugs will not be won. It is true, he said, that the National Police are constitutionally charged with drug eradication. But, he argued, police forces would be slaughtered by the narco-terrorists guarding the laboratories and the crops, if they didn't have protection from the army. Both colonels emphasized that they had just come from the battlefield, a reality which did not seem to penetrate the subcommittee's self-appointed democracy lovers."

Senators extol Bush's Iraq policy

The Senate Armed Services Committee paid homage to former Secretary of State James Baker III for crafting the Gulf policy which, they said, President Clinton was only continuing, at a hearing on Sept. 12. Completely ignored was the fact that the Gulf War, organized by George Bush and Margaret Thatcher, was part of designs for one-world government.

Richard Bryan (D-Nev.) said that he "was one member who was pleased to support the policy that he [Baker] and former President Bush had put together as part of Operation Desert Storm."

Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) gushed that "in terms of managing an alliance, I can't think of a better job than the one that was done by [Baker] and President Bush, Brent Scowcroft, Dick Cheney, and others in the Persian Gulf War."

Baker said that President Clinton had allowed the Gulf War coalition to collapse, and every effort had to be made to pull it back together to support

the expanded no-fly zone in the south of Iraq. To senators who were calling for the elimination of Saddam Hussein, Baker said that the "Lebanonization" of Iraq must be prevented. He said the policy should be a return to the UN Security Council Resolution and "containment."

House panel takes up crime in Nigeria

On Sept. 11, the House Subcommittee on Africa, chaired by Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), held a hearing on the threat of organized crime in Nigeria. The attack on the Abacha government of Nigeria is part of a British-orchestrated policy to destroy any government that might resist International Monetary Fund policies in Africa. Ros-Lehtinen claimed that "it can be argued that corruption in this West African nation is certainly one of the more serious problems threatening, not only the future of Nigerian democracy, but also U.S. domestic and international interests."

Some witnesses, such as Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mark Richards, wanted to use the issue of organized crime for a political attack on the Nigerian government. Others were looking at the situation from the standpoint of law enforcement.

Subcommittee members also took different approaches. Tom Campbell (R-Calif.) clearly intended his questions as a means of discrediting the Nigerian government, whereas Amory Houghton (R-N.Y.) wondered how the situation was any different from any other country which has serious problems with organized crime.

At issue was a form of financial fraud called "advanced fee fraud," in which criminals operating out of Nigeria swindle millions of dollars out of

suckers in the United States, by claiming to be legitimate businessmen or dissident government officials who need help moving money around. Apparently, people have been induced to turn over their bank account numbers, or to pay money, after receiving written solicitations for such schemes.

When asked why the situation in Nigeria is more dangerous than in a country such as Colombia, Richards said that Nigerians are more "ruthless." He called for continued pressure on the Nigerian government to get its house in order, and for a mobilization of other nations on the issue. Houghton wondered if this were not the responsibility of the administration. "Should we be building up pressure with other countries on a nation?" he asked.

'Gay' anti-discrimination bill rejected by Senate

A bill to prohibit discrimination against homosexuals in the workplace was defeated by a 50-49 vote in the Senate on Sept. 10. The bill was put forward by its proponents as a way of ending discrimination in the workplace. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said the bill "is not about special rights; it is instead about equal rights, equal protection." John Chafee (R-R.I.) said the bill does not protect inappropriate behavior in the workplace. "The same would apply to a non-gay individual who conducts himself inappropriately."

Opponents of the bill pointed to the potential problems of extending federal anti-discrimination protections to a mode of behavior. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) said the "practical impact of this bill is that employers will no longer be able to consider or hold an employee accountable for any acts related to

their sexual orientation." He added that if the bill becomes law, "it will give the federal stamp of approval to activities that are still considered illegal in many states," and "individual employers, employees, for-profit religious organizations [non-profits were exempted in the bill] and enterprises will no longer be able to conduct their business without fear of federal intrusion and potentially costly litigation."

Robert Byrd (W.V.), one of three Democrats to vote against the bill, explained after the vote that passage of the bill would have placed "sexual conduct on an equitable legal footing with such benign, nonbehavioral factors as race, gender, and national origin, immutable characteristics which each of us possess, but which none of us can alter."

Nickles moves to block District welfare waiver

Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.) introduced legislation on Sept. 9 to prohibit any waivers of the five-year limitation on welfare benefits that was enacted as part of the welfare reform bill signed into law by President Clinton last August. Nickles's bill is aimed at the waiver that was approved for the District of Columbia the same day the bill was signed. That waiver exempts the District from the five-year limitation for ten years.

Nickles said that the waiver attacks the five-year limitation on benefits, which he termed the "cornerstone" of the reform legislation. He also complained that it took the Clinton administration only 14 days to approve the D.C. waiver of the new requirements, when it has had in hand the Wisconsin waiver from the old requirements for 103 days, but still hasn't acted on it.