

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Contested elections fuel partisan wrangling

On Sept. 3, Senate Democrats embarked upon a strategy of selectively objecting to committees meeting during Senate sessions, and promised to do so until the Senate Rules Committee, chaired by John Warner (R-Va.), disposes in some satisfactory manner of the investigation of the 1996 Louisiana Senate election in which Democrat Mary Landrieu defeated Bush Republican Woody Jenkins by 5,788 votes. Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) complained that the investigation has yet to turn up any evidence of vote fraud, which was alleged by Jenkins.

Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) retaliated by recessing the Senate for two hours on the afternoon of Sept. 4, so that the Environment and Public Works Committee could complete action on an environmental cleanup bill, thus keeping the Senate in session until after 9:30 p.m. that night. Earlier, Lott angrily told the Senate, "If we're going to start playing this game of threats and delays and obstruction and blocking of committee meetings and that sort of thing, then I have no option but to put the time on the back end." Lott threatened that the effect of his action would be to slow down work on the appropriations bills, which the Democrats have said they have no intention of blocking.

Warner then reported that he had conducted two two-day hearings in Louisiana, and that after the first hearing, "much to the discouragement of many . . . there was no body of evidence which I felt could [have affected the outcome as a consequence of criminal fraud]." He said that what remains to be done is an examination of documents relating to a referendum on gambling that was also on the ballot at the same time, that the committee

acquired as the result of subpoenas. Warner promised that the examination of these documents would be completed by the third week of September.

On the House side, Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) made similar threats with respect to the House Oversight Committee's investigation of the election in California's 46th district, in which Democrat Loretta Sanchez defeated nine-term incumbent Robert K. Dornan by less than 1,000 votes. Gephardt said, "This election contest has gone long beyond where any contest has ever gone," and "no facts have been presented with regard to what Mr. Dornan originally brought up." He promised that "we're not going to let them [the Republicans] leave [for the end of the session in October] until this contest is dismissed, as it should have been a long time ago."

Federal funding of Teamsters election debated

On Sept. 4, the Senate began consideration of an amendment to the Labor-Health and Human Services appropriations bill that would prohibit Federal funding for re-running the Teamsters' 1996 election won by current Teamsters President Ron Carey. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), the sponsor of the amendment, argued that its only purpose was to "let the Teamsters pay," and not the taxpayers, for their election.

Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) objected strenuously, saying that Nickles's amendment was "basically a transparent attempt to punish the Teamsters Union for winning the UPS [United Parcel Service] strike." He added that the Federal government would be forced to "abdicate its responsibility under the [1989] court-ap-

proved consent decree ordered and signed by the Justice Department. . . . If the Federal government abdicates this responsibility, it could be subject to contempt proceedings in the Federal court." Kennedy offered his own amendment, saying "that nothing in the Nickles amendment would eliminate the obligations of the United States" under the original consent decree.

Nickles denied that he was attacking the Teamsters because of the UPS strike, and, while initially open to Kennedy's amendment, he eventually argued against it. Kennedy's amendment was tabled by a vote of 56-42, and Nickles's amendment was then passed on Sept. 8.

Livingston: cooperate on appropriations bills

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.), at a press conference on Sept. 4, urged House Republicans and Democrats to work together on the business that remains to be done before the end of the year. Referring to the 13 spending bills, Livingston said, "It's in the interest of the American people that we go ahead and finish the people's business with as little controversy and contention as possible."

Livingston addressed his remarks to Republicans as much as to Democrats. He said, "We know from experience that failure to complete the appropriations bills in an expedient manner can, in fact, result in a political and public relations nightmare. We've been there before. We don't anticipate repeating that increment of history." He also warned that if the Republicans add unacceptable riders to bills, "we can find ourselves in a briar patch that

will be very difficult to extricate ourselves from.”

Livingston acknowledged the leverage that President Clinton has over the Republican majority. “We don’t have the votes to override the President’s veto, and if he chooses to veto a particular bill, we’re stuck with that.” He added that instead of doing appropriations the hard way, by constantly adding unacceptable riders, “my hope is that we can work everything out.”

The House, so far, has passed 9 of the 13 spending bills, with 6 of them now in conference committee with the Senate. Of the remaining bills, the District of Columbia appropriations bill will likely cause the most controversy. That bill will be debated in an atmosphere of protest against increased authority over the District government being given to the Congressionally created financial control board.

Dissident GOPers attack budget agreement

Dissident House Republicans continued their attacks on “big government,” by attempting to slow down the Labor-Health and Human Services appropriations bill with amendments to shift money from salary and operations accounts of government agencies directly to disabilities education programs. The amendments would have specifically cut the agency that enforces wage and hour standards by \$4.3 million, and cut Occupational Safety and Health Administration funding by \$11.2 million.

David McIntosh (R-Ind.), the sponsor of one of the amendments, said that what was needed was a debate on the “spending priorities” in the bill. He claimed that it were better to take money out of an agency that enforces

wage and hour standards, in order to provide it to local schools.

David Obey (Wisc.), the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, attacked McIntosh’s amendment for threatening enforcement of the minimum wage and overtime pay standards. However, a good portion of the debate was between McIntosh and other dissidents, on one side, and John Porter (R-Ill.), the chairman of the Labor-HHS appropriations subcommittee, on the other. “We have done a yeoman’s job of putting resources into special education and taking the burden off of local school districts’ tax revenues in a major way,” Porter argued, and “this amendment is going to make virtually no difference in that effort. It will make substantial cuts in the wage and hour enforcement.”

However, the real agenda of the dissidents was revealed in remarks by Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), who claimed that cutting salaries and expenses of government agencies “drives efficiency and the bureaucracy in Washington and mandates it. There is less money for you to get the job done,” which he claimed would force more innovation.

McIntosh’s amendment was defeated by a vote of 260-167, and two other amendments, by Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) and Charles Norwood (R-Ga.), were defeated on Sept. 8 by similar margins.

Premature withdrawal from Bosnia a mistake

On Sept. 3, Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), in remarks on the Senate floor, emphasized the importance of continuing the international military mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina past the cur-

rent deadline of June 1998. Biden said that in order for progress in civilian implementation of the Dayton Accords to continue, “the international community must not withdraw its entire military stabilization force. . . . The negative consequences of backsliding into renewed warfare in Bosnia would far outweigh the cost of a continued, if scaled down, commitment with no or much fewer American troops.”

Biden, who visited Bosnia during the August recess, reported that he found himself, for the first time, in general agreement with the direction of American policy in Bosnia. But he indicated that much remains to be done, including the apprehension and bringing to trial in The Hague of indicted war criminals, including Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and wartime military commander Gen. Ratko Mladic. Biden said, “If all other means fail, force must be employed and risk taken in order to arrest [them].”

Later in the day, Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.) and Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), who traveled to Bosnia separately during the August recess, also expressed misgivings that the June 1998 withdrawal date could be met, but from a less optimistic standpoint than that of Biden. Hutchison called for a reexamination of U.S. policy, while Roberts argued that the June 1998 date simply could not be met. “We have changed the mission from peacekeeping to peace enforcement,” Roberts said, which has required a buildup of U.S. troops, from 8,500, to 12,000. Roberts acknowledged the difficulty of this situation, but said, “The case has not been made to the American public, to this Senate, or to us by the administration,” as to how the Dayton Accords are going to be made to succeed.