

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Appropriations, Other Bills Delayed By Shutdown

Before departing on Oct. 17, the House acted on conference reports on the Interior Department and the Military Construction appropriations bills. The Senate acted the following day, making these the first two of the 13 annual spending bills to be sent to President George Bush. However, with little prospect that the remaining bills will be completed quickly, both Houses passed another continuing resolution keeping the government open until Oct. 31.

Other legislation that has been delayed includes the aviation security bill, and various pieces of anti-terrorism legislation.

One piece of legislation that now seems unlikely to see the light of day is the bankruptcy reform bill. That bill had been passed in both the House and the Senate earlier this year, and had been scheduled for conference committee consideration on Sept. 12, but the events of Sept. 11 forced postponement of the conference committee meeting. The *New York Times* reported on Oct. 21 that, given the current economic climate, the bill simply isn't on the priority list, now. Also, many members don't want to be seen as tough on consumers.

Hyde, Graham Urge Caution On Iraq

Over the last few weeks, there has been a growing drumbeat for an attack on Iraq, especially from among members of Congress, but at least two key members of Congress are marching in a different direction.

House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), during an Oct. 20 appearance on CNN's "Novak, Hunt, and Shields" program, was asked by columnist Robert Novak if the United States

should attack Iraq "regardless of whether there is any firm evidence indicating complicity by the Iraqis in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11." Hyde replied that to do so would be a big mistake." He said, "I have no illusions about Saddam Hussein, but at the same time, I don't think we could put together the coalition against him and his country that we were able to put together in Desert Storm." Hyde added, with respect to Afghanistan and Iraq, "We have to be concerned with the aftermath of any battles we're in, because we need friends in this world, not enemies."

The following day, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Bob Graham (D-Fla.) echoed Hyde's warning during an appearance on Fox News Sunday. He said that while Iraq will continue to be "in our cross-hairs . . . we don't have the basis upon which to pull the trigger." He added that the standard of evidence "that we're really using now is the standard of what it's going to take to hold this coalition [against Afghanistan] together."

Hyde's and Graham's comments are in contrast to most of the public statements emanating from Capitol Hill in recent weeks, including from within Hyde's committee, where the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, chaired by Rep. Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.), held a hearing on Oct. 4, for the apparent purpose of cranking up the war propaganda against Iraq.

Media Psywar Targets House Over Shutdown

The House leadership decision to shut down in the midst of the anthrax scare on Capitol Hill, was used by the media as another angle in their psychological warfare campaign against the American people. The tactics were expressed by the Rupert Murdoch-owned *New York Post* on Oct. 18: The single word

on its front-page banner that day read, "Wimps!"

The Senate decided to stay in session another day, although the Senate office buildings were closed.

The morning the *New York Post* headline came out, CBS's Joan Clayson waved it in front of House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and asked him to respond to it. Gephardt said, "The House did what we thought was the prudent and careful thing to do and that was to make sure" that staff and the public "were not in harm's way." Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), appearing earlier on the same CBS program, simply refused to comment on the House action. Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), who followed Shelby and Gephardt, stated that he fully agreed with the Senate decision to stay open, and defended the House, indicating he thought their decision to shut down was done for "purely practical" reasons, because most Senators have offices in the Capitol Building, unlike House members.

The same pattern continued on the Sunday talk shows on Oct. 21. ABC's Sam Donaldson baited Daschle and Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.), by reporting that Democrat Rep. James Moran, whose Virginia district includes the Pentagon, complained, "You've got about a hundred would-be Presidents over there and they want to be able to thump their chests and say they're sending a message to the terrorists." Rather than rising to the bait, Daschle told Donaldson that the issue is not only safety, but also "ensuring that this democracy goes on." Lott agreed with Daschle.

The correctness of the decision to proceed cautiously was borne out by the discovery of anthrax contamination in a House mail sorting facility on Oct. 20. At least two workers in that facility have become ill with inhalation anthrax and two postal workers have died.