

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Congressional Delegation Pressures Arafat

On Jan. 17, three members of a four-person delegation from the House Intelligence Committee reported back on their tour of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. The delegation was led by Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), chairman of the Intelligence Committee's terrorism subcommittee, and included Jane Harman (D-Calif.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), and Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.). The group met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, King Abdullah of Jordan, Syrian President Bashar Assad, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, and intelligence officials of all their governments.

Chambliss had praise for Egypt and Jordan and their cooperation with the United States in its war on terrorism. He praised Assad's cooperation with the United States in tracking down al-Qaeda operatives in Syria, declaring that "this is the kind of spirit we have to have." However, Chambliss said that Assad is going to have to make some "tough decisions" regarding other terrorist groups that operate out of Syria.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, the delegation tended to blame Arafat for the Mideast bloodshed. Chambliss called on Arafat to stop the violence and to meet his commitments under the Tenet-Mitchell proposals. Both he and Harman blamed the *Karine A* incident—a ship seized in the Red Sea by Israel allegedly containing Iranian arms bound for the Palestinians, but which Arafat has identified as under Israeli control—on the Palestinian Authority and the Iranians, and called on Arafat to investigate the incident and punish anyone in the Palestinian Authority who may have been involved. Only then, Chambliss declared, will we see the U.S. attitude toward the Palestinian Authority improve.

When *EIR* pointed out that the Israeli bombing of Palestinian police stations, the assassinations policy, and provocations, make it nearly impossible for Arafat to do what he is being asked to do, Chambliss admitted that indeed, the Israelis have responsibilities as well. He said that in their meetings in Israel, "We expressed strong concerns . . . that Israel has an obligation also to move in the direction of peace." He admitted there have been "incidents," but said that the delegation was there to reinforce a communiqué from the Bush Administration to Arafat.

Budget Wrangling Continues Unabated

No sooner was the Fiscal Year 2002 budget put to rest just before Christmas, than the battle over the FY 2003 budget began. On Jan. 4, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said that last year's tax cut is the biggest reason for the disappearance of the budget surplus. In a speech sponsored by the Center for National Policy, he said that "not only did the tax cut fail to prevent a recession, as its supporters said it would, it probably made the recession worse."

Daschle proposed certain targeted business tax cuts and restoring "long-term fiscal integrity to our budget." He called for re-authorizing the 1996 welfare reform bill, "to ensure that people who have made the transition from welfare to work can remain in the workforce and not slide back into dependency."

On Jan. 13, John Spratt (D-S.C.), the ranking member on the House Budget Committee, explained how the Republicans squandered the \$5.6 trillion budget surplus that was forecast at the beginning of last year. Spratt was at least honest about the continued abdication of leadership that has charac-

terized the Democratic Party in recent years, when he said, "I'm not prepared to make a serious proposal" to address the budget problem. The only thing he suggested was a mechanism by which future surpluses would be used to repay the money that will be borrowed from Social Security and Medicare to paper over the budget deficits looming in the next three or four years.

Republicans are calling for more tax cuts. In two speeches in West Virginia on Jan. 22, President George Bush called on Congress to pass the GOP stimulus plan, which is mostly tax cuts. He also called on Congress to address energy, education, health care, and economic issues, above partisan politics, and not to be distracted by the Enron collapse. With eight Congressional investigations of Enron getting under way as Congress returns from its Winter break, that seems unlikely.

Daschle Offers Compromise On Economic Stimulus Bill

On Jan. 23, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) revealed the details of a compromise he has been discussing with GOP leaders to get movement on an economic stimulus bill. He told reporters, "What we have suggested is that we take those pieces that are common to both bills and try to move the process forward." Those pieces would include extension of unemployment benefits, tax rebates for those workers who did not get one last year, the bonus depreciation package, and \$5 billion in Medicaid assistance to the states. Under the process that Daschle proposed, a bill with those components would come to the Senate floor as the underlying bill for debate, which would then be subject to amendment by both sides. "The whole idea," he said, "is to move this process along." Initially, Republicans reacted favorably to Daschle's proposal.