

National News

Miss. GOP Leaders Hit Katrina Funding Neglect

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour (R), testifying Dec. 7 before the Bush-appointed House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina, chastised Congress for its inaction in approving desperately needed funds for infrastructure rebuilding in Mississippi. He said “recovery and renewal efforts” are now “stalled.”

Two days earlier, U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran (R), who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, flanked Bush’s inadequate \$17 billion Katrina relief proposal by crafting a package which doubled the amount, calling for an additional \$18 billion. Cochran’s \$18 billion adds \$11.5 billion to Bush’s \$1.5 billion request for Community Development Block Grants to help uninsured homeowners to rebuild and repair their homes. Senator Trent Lott (R-Miss.) on Dec. 2 criticized the recovery effort, calling on Bush to exert “leadership to ensure the Federal government fulfills its commitment to Mississippians.”

NAM Echoes Pelosi Call For Science Driver

The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) held a “National Summit on Competitiveness” Dec. 6, urging a program parallel to House Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi’s proposals in her Dec. 2 Boston speech, which she called a “Commitment to Competitiveness.” Pelosi described the NAM-sponsored Summit, held at the U.S. Department of Commerce, as “the Bush Administration following our lead,” and welcomed bipartisan cooperation on the initiatives, in a statement released the same day.

In his keynote address to the summit, NAM President John Engler called for:

- Increasing federal investment by 10% over the next seven years in physical sciences, engineering, and mathematics.
- Doubling the number of bachelor degrees in science, math, and engineering by

2015, and increasing the number of science and math teachers in grades K-12.

- Reform of immigration policies so more foreign-born students can study and work in science.

Fifty-five corporate CEOs, university presidents, and scientists participated in the day-long summit, “and pressed cabinet secretaries and members of Congress for more research and development funding,” according to an NAM press release. Participants described memories of the Apollo space program and the 1960s emphasis on science and math education which got them into science careers.

The new program was put forward by NAM head Engler, the former Republican governor of Michigan who was known for austerity policies. Engler credited Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) for initiating the competitiveness summit, with help from Republican Congressmen Sherwood Boehlert of New York, Chairman of the House Science Committee, and Vernon Ehlers of Michigan, Chairman of the House Environment Technology, and Standards Subcommittee.

Engler referenced the NAM’s recently released “2005 Skills Gap Report” showing that U.S. companies are unable to find the skilled workers they need, and that some developing nations turn out more engineers than we do.

Abramoff Partner Kidan To Plead Guilty and Sing

Adam Kidan, the organized-crime-linked partner of Jack Abramoff, wants to plead guilty and provide information against Abramoff and anyone else in the Abramoff orbit that the Federal government cares to indict, reported the Florida newspaper, the *Sun-Sentinel*, Dec. 8.

This is bad news for Abramoff associate Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), who had to step down from his post as House Majority Leader because of a fraud indictment, and Abramoff’s “padrone,” Dick Cheney, who appeared at a legal defense fundraiser for DeLay in Texas Dec. 5.

Kidan has known Abramoff since their days as “Young Republicans” in the 1970s.

Kidan and Abramoff were partners, along with Michael Scanlon, a former Tom DeLay top aide, in a bid to buy the gambling cruise ship line, Sun Cruz, using fraud. When complications interfered with the deal, the owner of Sun Cruz, Guy Boulis, ended up dead, in a mafia hit.

After Kidan and Abramoff were indicted for fraud in the Sun Cruz case, Kidan was implicated in the case against the killers of Boulis—two organized crime “hit men” from the Gotti crime family in New York. Now Kidan wants to plead guilty and testify against both Abramoff, and against the mob hit men who allegedly killed Boulis.

If Kidan pleads guilty and cooperates with the Florida U.S. Attorney, this catches both Abramoff—and potentially Tom DeLay—in a vise: In Washington, D.C., Scanlon, who was *not* indicted in the Sun Cruz case, is spilling the beans on Abramoff’s Congressional network, and in Florida, Kidan would provide information against Abramoff for other shady operations.

In the Washington, D.C. prosecution, where Scanlon pleaded guilty, one of the criminal acts involves favors (that is, bribes) paid to Ohio Republican Congressman Bob Ney, who praised Kidan in the attempt by him and Abramoff to take over Sun Cruz. Ney has been notified that he is also a target of the grand jury investigation.

House Bill Calls for Free Trade Moratorium

Dale Kildee (D-Mich.) introduced bill H.R. 4407, on Nov. 28, which calls for a “moratorium on all free trade agreements negotiated by the U.S.” for two years, as a way to “reverse domestic trade policy that has [devaluated] U.S. workers, small businesses, farmers, the environment and the economy.” Kildee argues that NAFTA, CAFTA, and all the FTAs—all of which he opposed—have resulted in the loss of millions of jobs, and threaten “entire industries that were once the bedrocks of this country.” Kildee referenced the bill in his e-hearing testimony submitted to the House Education and Workforce committee on the auto crisis.