

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Simpson cheerleads for Bush Medicare cuts

Senate Minority Whip Alan Simpson (R-Wy.), took the floor on Feb. 21 to lead the charge in favor of the Bush budget cuts in Medicare. The President's budget for Health and Human Services calls for reducing the growth of the Medicare budget from 13% to 11% by curtailing Medicare's subsidy to individuals, depending upon income status.

Claiming that "the elderly" are not a homogeneous group, Simpson said that the Bush cuts would demand that "wealthy individuals" pay "75% of the value of their benefits," instead of the 25% which is now the norm. This "modernization" of the entitlement programs, as Simpson characterized it, would bring "them into alignment with the economic and demographic realities of the 1990s and beyond," as the baby boomers reach retirement with less economic resources to go around.

Aspin demands occupation of southern Iraq

Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, proposed that the anti-Iraq coalition occupy southern Iraq, when interviewed on the CBS News program "Face the Nation" on Feb. 24, "as a means of negotiating in order to eliminate Saddam and the Baathist Party."

With the area south of Basra occupied by coalition troops, "just enough . . . to make the Iraqis want to get that back," and sanctions still in place, reasoned Aspin, the coalition could force the elimination of Saddam Hussein, the real goal of the Desert Storm operation. Aspin was one of the Dem-

ocrats in the House who worked hardest to bring key committee chairmen into line behind the resolution giving Bush the go-ahead for using force in the Persian Gulf.

The Aspin statements confirm that Bush and his supporters have wanted the war in the Gulf less for the sake of Kuwait than for eliminating the Arab government of Saddam Hussein.

House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.), interviewed on the same program, voiced some agreement with Aspin's views. "We want to be sure that there's as much damage done to the kind of military equipment that could be used against us sometime again or in that area for the next several years," said Foley. He added that the United States could have as many as 30,000 air and sea troops as part of a peacekeeping force stationed in the region.

In a Pentagon briefing on Feb. 25, congressional leaders were assured that the United States had no intention of holding on to Iraqi territory as a bargaining chip. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater commented only that "the administration's not stating a position on that issue."

Dole sends signal to Moscow: Drop dead

One of two things is very clear about Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.): Either the man is saying what George Bush fears to say, or one week of ground action has made him a little bit punch drunk. Whichever is the case, he assured fellow senators on Feb. 26 that, at least in Kansas, they do "not appreciate what they are hearing from Moscow" about a cease-fire in the Middle East conflagration.

Almost no sooner had the chaplain

prayed for the Lord to "grant the wisdom to leadership in Congress and the administration . . . who will be involved in the next delicate steps to reconstruction and peace," than Dole opened the session with a demand for "no letup, no cease-fire, no timeouts until Saddam Hussein himself raises the white flag. This is our bottom line. . . . "So, our mission is clear: It is time to finish the job, once and for all.

"And while hundreds of thousands of brave American men and women continue to risk their lives to get the job done, it is also time to send a signal to Moscow: It is time for you to butt out—we do not need any more free advice.

"We thanked you for your initial efforts, but let us face it, you have not risked a single life, or a single ruble in this conflict. Let me tell you, the American people are in no mood for any more Kremlin interference, promoting terms that could . . . save Saddam Hussein's neck, and preserve his Soviet-supplied war machine."

Our goal is not to kill Hussein, says Harkin

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) said in floor comments on Feb. 20, that if President George Bush's goal was to eliminate Saddam Hussein, he was overstepping the U.N. mandate to free Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation. Since the formal beginning of the ground war, Harkin has told reporters that he supports U.S. entry into Iraq and engagement of Iraqi forces as coherent with U.N. Resolution 678, so long as it is necessary to liberate Kuwait.

"Have we entered a new kind of conflict which was not authorized by the U.N. Security Council resolutions

nor contemplated by the Senate or the House when they debated and voted on this issue in January?" asked Harkin. "I cannot find one speech by one senator saying the vote was to permit the President to go beyond those U.N. resolutions."

Harkin noted that "most senators who spoke, and specifically those who spoke in favor of giving the President the authority to start military action, repeatedly used phrases like 'this is a vote not to go to war. This is a vote to prevent war.'

"The Senate resolution," continued Harkin, "does not say that the President is authorized to use our forces for anything other than that—not to get rid of Saddam Hussein, not to invade Iraq, not to do anything beyond what the Security Council resolutions say.

"If, in fact, the goals have changed," concluded Harkin, "and the goal is the eradication of Saddam Hussein as an individual, if the goal is the eradication of the present Iraqi government, or, as I have heard from some of my colleagues in the other body who are calling for unconditional surrender, if that is a goal, then that ought to be debated here and voted on." The senator's office confirmed that he plans no further action after the first week of ground action, and most of his colleagues concur.

Sanctions to become postwar trade war?

In a couple of pieces of legislation, the Congress is preparing to impose penalties on any country or firm which has allegedly violated the U.N. sanctions against Iraq, or which can be accused of having provided any country with materials or technology which

may have contributed to the production or dissemination of biological and chemical weapons "where that acts to maim or murder or injure an American citizen anywhere in the world."

Sen. James Exon (D-Neb.) submitted an amendment to the Export Administration Act on Feb. 20. "This amendment," said Exon in presenting his amendment, "would give the President the power to sanction foreign firms and individuals who violate the embargo but might not necessarily be within the jurisdiction of the United States."

The penalty for such violations would be to prevent them from acquiring property in the United States.

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) sponsored an amendment to the Omnibus Export Amendments Act which would impose criminal liability on any individual who is involved in the production or dissemination of biological and chemical weapons where that acts to maim, murder, or injure an American citizen anywhere in the world.

These measures imply an extension of extraterritoriality which has become, with the Thornburgh Doctrine, a means of allowing the United States to pursue political and other enemies while flouting the sovereignty of other nations. They also fit in with the "technological apartheid" doctrine of denying technology to Third World nations on the pretext that "dual use" technologies or materials may be used for either peaceful or violent purposes.

Specter of fascism: a new death penalty bill

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) has sponsored legislation to introduce the

death penalty for anyone involved in the planning of a terrorist act in which someone is killed. The Terrorist Death Penalty Act of 1991 is part of a series of moves to impose police-state rule in the United States, exploiting the jingoistic euphoria which has been stirred up around the Gulf war.

The only congressman who has given any hint of grasping the tie between the military spree in the Gulf and the imposition of an administrative fascist regime within the United States, seems to be Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.).

Hatfield has offered an amendment which would introduce mandatory life imprisonment for terrorism as an alternative to the death penalty. "In one breath," said Hatfield in floor comments on Feb. 20, "everyone is talking about building a new world order—about exercising leadership for peace in this world when this awful war comes to a close. But in the very next breath we are talking about imposing the most absolute, most barbaric, most inhumane punishment on Earth.

"The real subject here is us," said Hatfield. "Every time we talk about the death penalty we are talking about ourselves—about what kind of nation we want to be, about what kind of leaders we want to be, and we are talking about the future.

"Let there be no mistake," Hatfield continued, "this is a debate about what kind of role we want this nation to play in the future; about the credibility of the United States as a peacemaker."

Hatfield pointed out that the "United States stands virtually alone in its embrace of the death penalty," noting that Czechoslovakia, Romania, and South Africa have eliminated the death penalty during the last few months.