

North drug charges may yield post-election probe

by Edward Spannaus

In the final two weeks of the Virginia campaign for U.S. Senate, George Bush's stalking horse Oliver North has been heavily hit with widely publicized charges about his involvement in massive drug-smuggling operations in the 1980s.

Under these and related pressures, North has stumbled recently at a number of points, and is rapidly losing ground, according to many observers. But if he wins the Senate seat on Nov. 8, some consider it even more urgent that there be a new congressional investigation of the coverup of Contra drug-running operations which North and the Bush apparatus perpetuated during the failed "Iran-Contra" probes.

Among North's more notable recent foot-in-mouth episodes was his suggestion on Oct. 24 that Social Security should be made voluntary. "We've got 62 million Americans on the wagon that 91 million American households are pulling. We've got to find ways to get people off the wagon. Otherwise, nobody's going to be able to pull it." Typically, his campaign spokesmen had to immediately disavow North's statement, claiming it was not a major policy statement.

North also came under fire after putting a tearjerker ad on TV featuring former hostage David Jacobsen, who thanked North for saving his life. Other hostages responded by blaming North for their captivity because of his willingness to pay for hostages. Former hostage Robert Polhill, who spent three years chained to a wall, said regarding Jacobsen: "He's one of the guys who North got out. But I'm one of the guys who North got in."

George Bush's control of the Contra and Iran arms-for-hostages operations has been documented anew in a recently published book, which also details how the secret Bush-North White House operation was run in close coordination with British intelligence (see p. 75). On Oct. 28, the London *Independent*, reporting on the new allegations of British ties

to the North operation, said that they contradict both the conventional British view of "Irangate," and also specific statements by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Ollie's Cocaine Contras

After being suppressed for months, the North drug-running story began to be reported in much of the major news media beginning on Oct. 22. This followed months of hammering away on the issue by the "Defeat that Son-of-a-Bush Committee," headed by LaRouche Democrat Nancy Spannaus, with a campaign that included 1 million leaflets, radio ads, songs, and two tours of Virginia by former Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Celerino Castillo.

The *Virginian Pilot and Ledger Star*, the major newspaper in the Tidewater-Norfolk area, featured a huge, front-page article on Oct. 22 headlined, "What Did North Know?" with other prominent headlines such as "Contra Flights of Guns—and Cocaine," and a photo of DEA agent Castillo together with then-Vice President Bush. The *Pilot* story included detailed evidence from North's own notebooks, from the "Kerry Report" of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by John Kerry (D-Mass.), and from Castillo.

The *Washington Post*, which had been planning to run its story on North and drugs on Sunday, Oct. 23, rushed its story into its late editions on Oct. 22 so as not to be "scooped" by the *Pilot*—thus losing much of the readership the story would have received on Sunday. The *Post* story described much of the same evidence, and quoted, among others, former U.S. Customs head William Von Raab, who proclaimed himself "absolutely stunned" by North's drug-related notebook entries, and who said that North should have made that information available to him at the time.

In the wake of the new round of coverage, incumbent



These billboards and the campaign song "Goodbye Ollie" have unnerved the cocaine colonel's supporters all over Virginia.

U.S. Sen. Chuck Robb charged that "during the time when we were spending millions of dollars trying to stop drugs at our borders, Oliver North's office in the White House was the secret passage to bypass the DEA and U.S. Customs." Robb also said that if North had not reported the drug-trafficking evidence which he claims to have, "then he is guilty of perjury."

North typically denounced the drug allegations as "hog-wash," and refused to address the substance of the reports. On Oct. 24, North responded with a press conference by former Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams and former U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese, held in Arlington. Abrams claimed that "all of us who ran that program [the Contras], including Oliver North, were absolutely dedicated to keeping it completely clean and free of any involvement by drug-traffickers."

The reality is quite different. Abrams was up to his eyeballs in the Contra drug operation; he authorized State Department payments to known drug-traffickers for "humanitarian" aid shipments to the Contras; the same pilots and planes that flew "humanitarian" aid to the Contras, flew cocaine out of El Salvador's Ilopango airfield into the United States. Abrams probably had more to do with setting up the drug-running operation than even North did.

Former Senate investigator Jack Blum charged in response to the Abrams-Meese press conference that "every effort to investigate this was hamstrung by either the White House or Mr. Abrams or Mr. Meese." Speaking on WTOP radio in Washington, D.C., Blum said: "They were all interested in making sure that the supply effort continued, not that the drug trafficking stopped."

Contradicting North's claim that he is "the most investigated man on the planet," Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh issued a statement on Oct. 25, saying that he had never exonerated North's Contra operation of drug-trafficking charges. Walsh said he had preferred to concentrate his efforts elsewhere.

'Many people died . . .'

The coup de grâce to North's denials and lies came in a press conference given by former Senate investigator Blum at the State Capitol in Richmond on Oct. 27. "He worked with drug traffickers, and he worked with terrorists," Blum charged. "He should answer for that, and he should answer publicly."

"We had a drug epidemic in the United States, people were dying on the streets, we had shoot-outs, crack was beginning to make an appearance, and here you have a guy in a public policy position—indeed, a whole administration, many of whom now are stepping forward to defend him—that made a decision that the Contra war was more important than dealing with this drug problem," Blum told a large group of newspaper and television reporters. "The time has come for these people to face the political consequences of their actions."

"Oliver North has to take responsibility, and answer to it," Blum continued. "If he's not held accountable now, exactly when will he be held accountable?"

"Many people died because of those drug shipments," Blum declared.

Blum's charges were backed up by a senior Republican staffer who also worked on the Kerry Committee investigation. Clifford Kiracofe, a former aide to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), interviewed by AP, said he agreed with Blum's view that North knew about the drug trafficking. "My intuitive judgment is that North did know or should have known. He was micromanaging that operation very closely."

Blum concluded his press conference by remarking that North "is a man who has utter contempt for legal processes, for the notion of checks and balances, and for the idea of constitutional government."

"It is peculiarly inappropriate for a man like this to be representing the state of Virginia, where many of these concepts first flourished. . . . His disdain for them is quite remarkable, and makes him totally inappropriate as a senator for this state."