

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

House insists on funds for veterans medical care

On Nov. 30, the House voted 216-208 to recommit the Veterans Affairs-Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill conference report back to conference committee, with instructions that the House conferees insist on the original House amendment that provides an additional \$213 million for veterans medical care.

Criticism of the bill from Democrats centered on provisions dealing with public housing, medical care for veterans, and environmental enforcement, and the floor debate was particularly strong. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) said that the Republicans "have shown a blindspot to the high cost in human suffering and damage to this country's precious resources that this legislation will extract."

John Dingell (D-Mich.) called the bill "outrageous," and said it was "the worst attack on housing since the Hoover administration."

David Obey (D-Wisc.), who made the motion to recommit the bill, said that it would "leave our country much poorer."

GOP sour grapes over Clinton's Ireland trip

On Nov. 30, several Republican senators took to the floor of the Senate to criticize the President on both the budget and his plan to deploy U.S. troops to Bosnia as part of the peace agreement.

Incredibly, James Inhofe (R-Okla.) claimed that the President was "hiding out in Europe." While "the President is out rejoicing in his new posture as the international peacemaker in Belfast and other places, time is going by and American troops, as we speak, are being sent to Bosnia," he

complained. Characterizing the situation in Bosnia along the lines of the British-scripted ethnic warfare propaganda, Inhofe said that after the initial deployments of U.S. soldiers, "larger and larger numbers will be coming because that is the President's plan, as he hides over in Europe and allows more and more of our soldiers to go over to put us in a position where we have to support him, to send ground troops in."

Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) suggested that this "is not the kind of thoughtful discussion that would advance a spirit of cooperation, to do the right thing for this country." He said that "it is thoughtless for anyone to come here and suggest that what the President is doing at this point in Europe, dealing with the issue of peacekeepers in Ireland, and so on, is that the President is hiding out."

Telecommunications bill lacks universal access

On Nov. 30, Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), in remarks on the floor of the Senate, attacked the telecommunications reform legislation currently working its way through conference committee. He said that "the market system is not going to decide that the income stream in a rural state is going to persuade people to come and engage in robust competition to provide new services in rural areas."

Dorgan added that the reason rural communications services exist is because "we have decided that it is a matter of universal importance for everyone to have modern communications equipment so that everyone can communicate with one another." He reported that a bipartisan coalition of senators has written a letter to the con-

ference committee to support the provisions in the bill that protect universal access for rural areas. The House conferees are trying to strip that provision out of the legislation.

Rangel slams hypocrisy of Gingrich, Gramm

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) appeared at the Women's National Democratic Club on Nov. 28, to discuss the "Democratic Perspective on Social Programs." He ridiculed Presidential candidate Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) for having built their lives on federal paychecks almost from the time they were born, and yet both now talk so much about "privatization and getting government out of our lives."

Rangel described Gramm as someone "seeking public housing at the White House. . . . I'm not saying this is wrong, but you can't get there and then feel you have an obligation to pull that ladder away for other people who try to attain it."

Rangel described social and other government programs going back to the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt as investments in Americans. Instead, with the Republicans, he said, "we have a disdain for the things that were happening under Roosevelt, under Johnson, and under Kennedy. A disdain where we have compassion, with the federal government trying to give a safety net. And we have a philosophy that the United States government should not be involved, is saying anybody is not entitled to anything, which includes Social Security—they just don't have the political heart to hit it, this time."

Rangel asserted that the fight is not

about a balanced budget, but rather "putting the United States of America in a position that once these programs are cut, never will they be restored as national programs." He said that the way this works is that, when federal taxes are reduced by \$245 billion, as the Republicans are trying to do, then state and local taxes are increased to pay for services that were formerly paid for by federal revenue. He said no Congress will come back and raise federal taxes, on top of the state and local tax increases that will result from the Republican budget plan, in order to restore the services that are cut. "So when you hear all of this talk about balanced budgets," said Rangel, "forget it, and realize what they're doing is saying . . . that being old, being poor, being aged, that you're not entitled. 'Go to look for it at local government, go to look for at state government.' Once we tighten up, you're not going to find any Congress, Republican or Democrat, [that will say], 'We're going to increase your taxes on top of what local and state government has done.' And that's abundantly clear."

Tax cut pledge is called 'negotiable'

The House and Senate budget committee chairmen, John Kasich (R-Ohio) and Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), respectively, both agreed on NBC's Meet the Press on Dec. 3, that the Republicans' \$245 billion tax cut plan is negotiable. "I would tell you," Kasich said, "that we're not going to end up with \$245 billion at the end of the day. It's going to be less than that." Domenici added that "everything's on the table, but they [the Clinton administration] have to bring their budget to the table."

Kasich reiterated that the Republicans are still committed to the capital gains tax cut, "because we want the economy to grow." He claimed that the capital gains tax cut will spur investment and job creation which will help "balance the budget."

Work schedule makes members, staff edgy

Congress's heavy work schedule, aggravated by the budget wrangling between the Clinton administration and Congress, has made many in Congress nervous about whether they'll be able to spend the holidays with their families.

Freshman Rep. Mark Neumann (R-Wisc.) blasted the House leadership in a letter to the editor in *The Hill* newspaper on Nov. 29. He said the the schedule is interfering with his family life and even making it difficult to meet with constituents in his district. He wrote that he was even told by the House leadership that "if you have children, you should not serve in Congress." Neumann referred to the half-dozen members of the freshmen class who have been divorced or are in the process of getting divorced. "When my service to my country in this office is over, I fully intend to still have my family to come home to," he said.

David Dreier (R-Calif.) was questioned on the House floor about the schedule in view of the upcoming holiday season. "At this point," he said, "there are just so many questions that remain; we are hoping to see a budget agreement, we are hoping to see a wide agreement on other things, and until those are resolved, we do not know what the schedule will be after the 15th."

When *Roll Call* asked David Obey

(D-Wisc.), the ranking minority member of the House Appropriations Committee, when he thought the House would adjourn for the year, he replied, "That [question] assumes we will finish [the budget] this year."

Gingrich ethics investigation tabled

On Nov. 30, the House voted to table, for the second time in two weeks, a privileged resolution sponsored by Harry Johnston (D-Fla.) and Pete Peterson (D-Fla.) to require the House ethics panel to report on its investigation of complaints against Speaker Newt Gingrich. The motion to table, which prevented debate on the resolution, was offered by Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), and it passed by a vote of 218-170.

Earlier in the day, a number of Democrats had demanded debate on the resolution. Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) said that the ethics panel ought to provide a report, "especially on a day when the newspapers in America are filled with articles talking about how the Federal Election Commission has said the appearance of corruption is spread all over GOPAC and the speaker's fundraising." She told the members of the House, "If you vote to table, you are covering up."

After the vote, Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.) referred to the fact that the House voted for the second time to refuse to discuss "in the light of day" what the ethics panel has been doing for the last 14 months. "I believe that our Republican colleagues can hold that pressure cooker lid down," he said. "But sooner or later, enough people in this country are going to care about the operations of this House and the ethics of this House, that they are going to demand action."