

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Disaster relief bill a disaster for GOP

Republicans, chastened by the Democratic campaign that followed President Clinton's June 9 veto of the disaster relief bill which would have aided flood-stricken areas in the Plains states especially, agreed on June 12 to pass the bill without two of their provisions—the permanent continuing resolution, and a stipulation that sampling methods not be used in the year 2000 census.

The Democratic offensive began before Clinton's veto was official. During a noon press conference on June 9, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) vowed, "We're not going to allow our Republican colleagues to take the focus off this disaster legislation. It's very important for us to stay on the ball, to stay with this piece of legislation until we get it done. So we're not going to be in agreement on moving to other pieces of legislation until we get this legislation done."

Key in the Democratic offensive was an all-night vigil during the evening of June 10-11. Twenty-four senators and 16 members of the House conducted 75 radio and TV interviews throughout the night all over the country. Daschle called it a "successful evening," in which the goal was "to draw attention to this issue and to make it clear that we're determined to put as high a priority on the passage of this disaster bill . . . in a way the President can sign it, as we possibly can."

By Wednesday morning, June 11, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) signalled willingness to compromise on the census issue, and the House GOP leadership indicated the same on the continuing resolution. On June 12, the supplemental appropriation was voted up in both Houses, with significant Republican support; funding levels were unchanged, the census

provision was watered down to a "study," and the continuing resolution was dropped. The only concession made by the Democrats was to allow votes on separate bills on the census and continuing resolution issues.

The Republican defeat led to recriminations within the party, especially in the House. By June 13, a revolt appeared to be brewing in the Republican Conference against Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), over the way he had brokered the deal that brought the revised bill to the floor. Almost the entire top House Republican leadership were among the 74 votes against the bill, including Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-Tex.), Conference Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio), and Policy Committee Chairman Christopher Cox (R-Calif.). An aide to one of the Republican leaders told *Roll Call*, "This was a repudiation of Newt's leadership."

Tax-cut plan offered by House Democrats

On June 12, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) released the Democratic alternative to the Republican tax-cut plan released by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) earlier in the week. Gephardt said that the Democrats' plan is "better for America's families, it is better for education, and it is better for the long-run deficit outcome because it doesn't explode the deficit in the out years."

According to the Democratic summary, the plan will target 69% of the tax relief to families with incomes under \$57,500. The plan includes \$42 billion in education tax credits (\$7 billion more than in the budget agreement), and a capital gains tax rate of

7.5% for taxpayers in the 15% bracket, or 18% otherwise. However, it would not apply to publicly traded stocks, a major departure from the Archer plan, which specifically encourages stock speculation.

House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio), on the ABC News program "This Week with David Brinkley" on June 15, complained that the Democrats were waging "class warfare. . . . I think it's outrageous that there are Democratic leaders who are trying to divide America." He did, of course, defend the Archer capital gains tax cut provision, arguing that the bulk of it goes to people making less than \$100,000, and that these people "now are capital gain wage earners."

Foreign Relations bill passed in House

The House passed the Foreign Relations Authorization bill by voice vote on June 11. It includes provisions to reorganize and consolidate the State Department.

Among the amendments adopted was one offered by Bill Paxon (R-N.Y.), condemning the Palestinian Authority for allegedly allowing the retributive murder of Palestinian landowners who sell land to Israelis. Paxon accused the Palestinian Authority, including President Yasser Arafat, of complicity in this practice "that threatens the continued progress toward peace." Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), in a rare floor appearance, said, "This is the kind of action we identify with Nazis."

The Paxon amendment is part of a series of British-instigated House actions designed to destroy Mideast peace prospects. No reservations were

expressed about the amendment, and there was no acknowledgment of the sabotage of the Oslo accords by the Netanyahu government in Israel. The attitude toward peace was summed up by Randy Cunningham (R-Calif.), who said, "I do not believe [we will have peace] in my lifetime."

Another amendment, sponsored by Donald Payne (D-N.J.), lifts restrictions on foreign aid to Laurent Kabila's Democratic Republic of Congo. Payne said, "I am not a pro- or anti-Kabila person, but I feel that we must start to assist the Congo in getting over the tremendous damage done by the Mobutu regime." International Relations Committee Chairman Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.) added that, with Mobutu gone, "the lives of the Congolese people can only improve." Unlike Payne, however, Gilman acknowledged reports of massacres of innocent civilians by Kabila's troops. He said, "We will be putting the Kabila government on notice to support democracy and human rights before aid can go forward."

Bush-league Sessions defends Kenneth Starr

Sen. Jefferson Beauregard Sessions (R-Ala.) came to the defense of White-water special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, during the June 13 confirmation hearing on the nomination of Eric Holder to become Deputy Attorney General. Starr has come under increasing criticism for numerous conflicts of interest and running a partisan investigation. While Sessions was still a candidate for Senate, *EIR* had warned of his close relationship to the Bush networks in the Department of Justice (see *EIR*, Sept. 20, 1996, p. 61).

During the hearing, Judiciary

Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) asked Holder if "the attempts to characterize Judge Starr's investigation as a 'witch-hunt' . . . serves to unfairly impugn the motives of prosecutors and to undermine our legal system, and should not go unanswered?" Holder avoided any direct reference to Starr or his critics, saying only that prosecutors learn to endure such attacks, and that, in specific cases, they have a right and a duty to respond appropriately.

Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) was less circumspect. He said, "I would note for the record that Mr. Starr has no reluctance to speak to highly partisan audiences, to release confidential material on his investigation in interviews, to continue to represent groups that are on record as opposing President Clinton." Leahy suggested that Starr has done much to bring criticism on himself. "I think Mr. Starr's willingness to speak out in front of partisan audiences in the way that he has, does diminish . . . his independence and his evenhandedness," Leahy said.

Sessions jumped to Starr's defense. "It's difficult to be a prosecutor. You try to do your duty and everybody wants to criticize you," he said, describing Starr as "a man of integrity and ability" who makes speeches that are "real learned discourses on the role of the independent counsel. . . . It concerns me that members of this body would make less than respectful comments about the able work that he has done."

'Donor-gate' probe sparks brawl in Senate panel

A verbal slug-fest took place on June 12 during a four-hour meeting of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, which is conducting an investi-

gation of alleged campaign financing irregularities. Committee Chairman Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.) said that the committee will begin public hearings during the week of July 8. "This committee has a very serious and solemn responsibility, investigating whether people were placed in high levels in our government in exchange for campaign money, whether vital information important to this country was compromised, whether foreign governments sought to or did in fact infiltrate our political process," he said.

Thompson argued that the committee majority had been proceeding in a non-partisan manner, despite the accusations of Democrats. However, it quickly emerged that the committee has issued 160 subpoenas so far; of these, 142 are aimed at Democratic targets. The Democrats on the committee have asked for 53 subpoenas to be issued which go after GOP targets; the committee majority has only approved 18 of these.

John Glenn (D-Ohio), in pointing this out, noted that one of the subpoenas being denied involves the National Policy Forum and money channelled into the Republican National Committee. This, Glenn said, is the "one real track of foreign money that we know came in from abroad, and came into a political campaign and into Republican coffers. . . . That's the only foreign money we know of so far."

The GOP members of the committee wanted to have the committee vote to grant immunity to 18 witnesses, 15 of whom are monks and nuns from the Buddhist temple in southern California which Al Gore attended last fall. Because granting immunity requires a two-thirds vote, Democrats blocked the immunity, and said they will continue to do so until they get all their subpoenas issued.