

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### **GOP Splits Over Issue of Highway Spending**

Yet another sign of discontent within GOP ranks over the Bush Administration's austerity policy emerged on May 11, when Senate Finance Committee chairman Charles Grassley (R-Ia.) and Budget Committee chairman Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) got into a verbal brawl on the Senate floor. At issue was the level of funding in the nearly two-years-overdue highway authorization bill. The Bush Administration is demanding that the six year bill be limited to \$285 billion, which is also the level set in the Fiscal Year 2006 budget resolution. Although it is a significant increase over last year, when the White House was threatening to veto anything over \$256 billion, a significant majority of the Senate was still not happy. The Senate voted 76 to 22, on May 11, to waive the budget resolution in order to increase the funding to \$296 billion.

The Democrats all voted for the increase, without dissent, and barely participated in the debate, leaving it to Grassley, and Environment and Public Works Committee chairman James Inhofe (R-Okla.), on the one side, and Gregg on the other, to fight it out.

Gregg charged that the bill was turned into a "budget buster" because it exceeded the amount allocated by the budget resolution, and that the revenue increases that Grassley added to the bill to offset the additional spending were "illusory," a charge which Grassley took personally.

"It is particularly troubling that this nonsense attack comes from a committee that doesn't do any of the heavy lifting to find real offsets and real savings," Grassley said, "but instead just finds reasons to complain about some other committee's work." Gregg, in turn, told the Senate that "for the chairman of the Finance Committee to come down here and say, in

terms which were most aggressive and most intense, that the Budget Committee was acting inappropriately . . . I think that is just misdirected."

The bill passed the Senate on May 17 by a vote of 89 to 11.

### **Senate Panel Reports Defense Authorization Bill**

On May 13, the Senate Armed Services Committee completed work on the Fiscal 2006 defense authorization bill, authorizing \$441.6 billion for the Defense Department, and, for the first time, including a \$50 billion authorization for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill also includes, among other things, additional incentives for recruiting and retention of both active duty and reserve component troops, \$500 million to be dedicated to the task force working to develop countermeasures against roadside bombs, \$344 million for vehicle armor ( which is \$120 million more than the Bush Administration is asking for), and an increase in the Army's end strength from 512,400 soldiers to 522,400.

The House has not completed work on its version of the bill yet, but is expected to approve a similar increase in end strength, which is expected to be vigorously opposed by the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

A related matter is also causing heartburn at the Pentagon: an amendment approved by the House Personnel subcommittee, on May 11, that would ban women from service in forward support companies, Army logistics units that provide direct support to infantry and armor units engaged in combat. Subcommittee chairman John McHugh (R-N.Y.) argued that the amendment only enforces the already

existing ban on women in combat, and would have only minimal effect on the Army, an assertion that the Army is disputing.

### **Dems Propose New Ethics Rules That Target DeLay**

On May 17, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), the chairman of the House Democratic Policy Committee, announced a new proposal to rewrite some of the ethics rules of the House. Aside from outright banning of gifts to members of Congress by lobbyists, and lobbyist-financed travel, the package includes a provision to stop the so-called K Street project, a project of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) to populate the major Washington, D.C. lobbying firms with Republicans and make it harder for Democrats to get jobs in these firms.

Pelosi denied that the bill was aimed primarily at DeLay's alleged activities, though it is clearly intended to put a stop to some of those kinds of things. "This is designed not toward any member, but to the American people," she said. "It's about increasing their voices in the Congress instead of having it be in line behind lobbyists in Washington, D.C." She added that while she doesn't want to paint all lobbyists with the same brush, "I do see a network and a web that has been formed here, that corrodes the ethical standard, builds the skepticism of the American people as to what is going on here in Congress, and indeed paints all of us with the same brush."

Pelosi and Miller's proposal followed, by about ten days, one by Representatives Marty Meehan (D-Mass.) and Rahm Emmanuel (D-Ill.) which includes some of the same provisions.