

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Republicans on rampage over illegal immigration

House Republicans introduced on Feb. 10 a sweeping immigration bill which would impose a \$1.50 fee on anyone entering the United States by land, add 6,000 Border Patrol agents, and build fences and ditches to deter illegal crossings. It would also phase in over five years a "tamper-proof" Social Security card that would be used to verify employment eligibility, and would set up new screening procedures whereby hearing officers at airports would be allowed to turn away asylum seekers whose claims don't appear legitimate.

The legislation has raised an outcry from Hispanic groups and religious organizations. Raul Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza, said that the Republican measures were "giving us explosive rhetoric and legislation which would increase discrimination against Americans and endanger the lives of refugees."

Term limits suffers major defeat in courts

The movement to impose term limits on U.S. congressmen suffered a major defeat on Feb. 10 when a federal district judge ruled that the State of Washington's new law limiting congressional terms was unconstitutional. Proponents of term limits intend to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

The measure, entitled Initiative 573, was approved as a ballot initiative by Washington voters in 1992. It would have limited House members to three two-year terms over 12 years and members of the Senate to two six-year terms over 18 years. Similar measures have been approved in 14 other

states since 1990.

House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.), who would have been affected by the measure, was one of the people who challenged the measure in court. The judge said the initiative was unconstitutional because it wrongly attempted to add qualifications for congressional candidates beyond those explicitly stipulated in the Constitution.

"A state may not diminish its voters' constitutional freedom of choice by making would-be candidates for Congress ineligible on the basis of incumbency or history of congressional service," Judge William L. Dwyer stated in his decision. The initiative, he said, "is aimed not at achieving order and fairness in the process, but at preventing a disfavored group of candidates from being elected at all."

Vote on Strobe Talbott nomination delayed

Senate leaders on Feb. 10 put off a vote on the nomination of Strobe Talbott to become deputy secretary of state until late February because of Republican objections.

Talbott, a close friend of President Clinton and a former writer for *Time* magazine, is now the administration's chief policymaker on the former Soviet states. He came under fire from supporters of the International Monetary Fund when, after returning from a trip to Russia after the December elections in which the forces of Third Rome ideologue Vladimir Zhirinovskiy made major gains, he said that there should be "less shock and more therapy" in Russia, thereby criticizing IMF "shock therapy" policies.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved Talbott's nomination 17-2 on Feb. 9, with Jesse

Helms (R-N.C.) and Hank Brown (R-Colo.) voting against. Helms challenged Talbott at a hearing on Feb. 8 for writing in *Time* in 1981 that Israel had become a liability to U.S. security interests. Shortly after his nomination, the Zionist Organization of America issued a report that called Talbott "anti-Israeli." Talbott said his views had changed but that the essay was critical of Likud government policies at that time, not Israel.

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) asked for a Senate vote before the start of a 10-day congressional recess on Feb. 10, but Minority Leader Bob Dole (Kan.) said there were objections by some of his colleagues. Under Senate rules, a single objection is enough to temporarily block a vote. Dole said he would work with Mitchell to try to arrange a vote after the Senate returns on Feb. 22.

Independent counsel law gets boost in House

The House approved by voice vote on Feb. 10 a bill to put the independent counsel law back on the books. The independent counsel was established in the aftermath of Watergate to investigate, independently of the Department of Justice, alleged criminal activity in the Executive branch.

The legislation has been strongly criticized by Republicans, especially the investigation of Lawrence Walsh into the involvement of Reagan-Bush administration officials in the Iran-Contra affair. Because of GOP resistance, the independent counsel law was not renewed in 1992. Since then, with the Democratic Clinton administration coming into power, however, Republicans have grown fond of the legislation, wanting to expand the independent counsel law to include in-

vestigation of congressmen.

Under the legislation, the attorney general would have the option of invoking the statute in cases involving members of Congress. The statute would provide for prosecutors appointed by a panel of federal judges in cases involving high-ranking administration officials.

Serbian aggression must be stopped, senators say

On Feb. 8, several senators called for action to stop Serbia's war of aggression against Bosnia. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) said that President Clinton and NATO should act immediately against the Serbs. "The West did nothing in the mistaken belief that silence would bring peace," Biden said. "It has only brought more death and more tragedy. The silence must end."

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) called for air strikes against Serbian artillery positions and for lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian government. He ridiculed the purpose of the U.N. "peace-keeping" forces in Bosnia. "If that requires a withdrawal of the troops of our allies, so be it," Hatch said. "If the risk to those troops prevents us from lifting the embargo, it's time for those troops to go home. The President's policy of endless consultations has failed. It's time for the United States to lead and to act, regardless of the positions taken by the European powers."

Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) said that air strikes should be carried out by the United States even if NATO refused to participate. "The time for equivocation is over," he said.

Charles Robb (D-Va.) called for the United States to use cruise missiles to attack Bosnian Serb positions, and said that the U.S. should lift the arms embargo, unilaterally if necessary.

Earthquake relief survives budget cutters

The Senate on Feb. 9 staved off by a vote of 65-31 attempts by a coalition of Republicans and austerity Democrats to "piggyback" \$94 billion worth of spending cuts over five years onto a bill which would send emergency aid to earthquake victims in California. Attempts to add other budget-cutting amendments were also defeated. The earthquake relief bill was passed on Feb. 11 by the Senate, and the House then passed the legislation 245-65.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. Hank Brown (R-Colo.) and Sen. Robert Kerrey (D-Neb.), called for 57 separate spending cuts that would have saved \$7 billion this year, almost double the \$3.4 billion in cuts proposed by the administration. The measure was similar to legislation defeated earlier in the House sponsored by Tim Penny (D-Minn.) and John Kasich (R-Ohio).

Gonzalez launches new attack on Federal Reserve

House Banking Committee Chairman Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) attacked the Federal Reserve in a speech on the House floor on Feb. 10, questioning its need for employing numerous outside financial consultants despite the large number of analysts who are part of the Fed, and criticizing its extravagance at its conferences, where attendees spend a good part of their time playing golf. Gonzalez quoted Milton Friedman, who said that the Fed "was buying up most of its likely critics."

Gonzalez mentioned how the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, "not finding its facilities fancy enough," had scheduled a three-day conference on derivatives in Coconut Grove, Florida at an expensive luxury hotel at

the end of February. By means of such "camaraderie and benevolence," and "by throwing a little Miami Beach sand in their faces," the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta "will produce many friends among experts in financial derivatives, the very area that the Banking Committee is considering legislation in," he said. By such means, the Fed is acting like "any other corporate titan," although it "wants us to think it is the independent, non-political central bank. . . . The Fed has its hands deep in the taxpayers' pockets and should not be exempt from careful oversight."

Gonzalez announced that he was beginning an investigation into how the Fed was conducting itself in respect to outside consultants and conferences. He said his proposed Federal Reserve System Accountability Act of 1993 was the best way of dealing with "waste in government."

Budget Amendment called 'serious mistake'

Seventeen constitutional law experts from around the country sent a letter to Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), an opponent of a Balanced Budget Amendment, characterizing the amendment as "a serious mistake." The chief sponsor of the Balanced Budget Amendment is Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.). The Clinton administration is opposed to the amendment, which will be debated late in February.

The signers, who ranged from liberals such as Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe to conservative Judge Robert Bork, warned that such an amendment "would deprive the Congress and the President of needed flexibility" and "would involve the Judiciary in intractable questions of fiscal and budgetary policy."