

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Turmoil lurks behind GOP's unified front

The House Republican leadership held a joint press conference on Feb. 11, at the conclusion of a two-day retreat in Williamsburg, Virginia. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said that among the topics discussed were the war on drugs, education reform, how to use the anticipated budget surplus to reform the retirement system, and "rethinking government systems" to make government smaller with lower taxes.

Joining Gingrich were Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) and Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-Tex.), both of whom were implicated in the attempted coup against Gingrich last summer, and Republican Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman John Linder (R-Ga.), a Gingrich loyalist. Delay said, "This retreat really impressed me. The members are all upbeat. They're very excited. They think it's very exciting to debate whether to pay down the debt or cut taxes because of our fiscal policies and our fiscal restraint in balancing the budget this year."

Despite the apparent unity, lurking in the background is the struggle to succeed Gingrich as House Speaker. According to columnist Robert Novak, Gingrich is widely expected to resign as Speaker to run for the Republican Presidential nomination in the year 2000, opening a battle among rivals in the leadership. Widely reported is that Bill Paxon (R-N.Y.), who was implicated along with Armey and Delay in the failed coup attempt, is considering challenging Armey for the Majority Leader post this year. Whoever is Majority Leader when Gingrich steps down is expected to succeed him as Speaker, assuming the GOP holds its majority in the House. Paxon is said to be popular in the GOP caucus.

Adding fuel to the fire is a new book by Paxon's wife, former Rep. Susan Molinari (R-N.Y.), which was excerpted by the *New York Post* during the Williamsburg retreat. Molinari attacks Gingrich as an egomaniac and crybaby, who frequently broke out in tears during the showdown with President Clinton over the government shutdowns in 1995.

Iraq resolution on hold as Congress recesses

Congress recessed for the President's Day holiday on Feb. 13 without taking up a resolution urging President Clinton "to take all necessary and appropriate actions to respond to the threat posed by Iraq's refusal to end its weapons of mass destruction programs."

In the Senate, Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said on Feb. 11 that he expected the resolution to come up the following day, even though he and Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) hadn't yet agreed on the terms of the debate. He said he thought it would pass with a "fairly consequential margin," although probably not unanimously.

Lott and Daschle indicated on Feb. 12 that there were "logistical problems" that prevented them from bringing the resolution to the floor. Lott said that Senators John Warner (R-Va.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.) were, at that moment, in Moscow with Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and said that the Senate should have a chance to hear from them before voting on any resolution. Lott gave two other, possibly more problematic reasons for the delay: concerns about how much a military operation against Iraq would cost and lack of agreement on the language of the resolution.

These two concerns both relate to

questions over U.S. policy toward Iraq. Views expressed so far range from backing for a military strike to remove Saddam Hussein from power, expressed by John McCain (R-Ariz.), to more measured caution about the possible consequences.

On Feb. 9, Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) said that U.S. policy must take into account both short- and long-term policy objectives. "What chain of events will we unleash with any action we take?" he asked. "What is the administration's long-term objective in Iraq? Do we have one? Or, are we crafting a long-term policy to justify short-term actions?"

Hagel was seconded by Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) the next day, who invoked the memory of a similar debate which led to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964, and also warned of dangerous consequences all over the world. "The political reality," he said, "is that limited bombing with no plan for getting rid of the menace will lead to the perception of the United States conducting a military exercise with innocent civilians being killed on worldwide television with ominous repercussions throughout the Muslim world, including the trouble spots of Bosnia and in Indonesia."

Democrats, Clinton hold pep rally on agenda

On Feb. 12, the Democratic leadership of both Houses, joined by President Clinton, announced their legislative priorities for 1998. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said that the agenda was developed over the last six months in conjunction with the administration. "Today, we are here to ratify that agenda and begin the process of translating it into action, to confront the real problems with real solu-

tions for the American people," he said.

Among items included on that agenda are making child care more affordable, raising the minimum wage by \$1 an hour, hiring 100,000 new teachers, and passing the Patient's Bill of Rights, a bill to ensure access to emergency room services and medical specialists. Also included is a plan to strengthen Social Security and making private pensions more affordable and secure.

House formally ends Sanchez probe

On Feb. 12, the House voted 378-33 to end the investigation of the 1996 election in California's 46th district, in which Loretta Sanchez (D) upset nine-term incumbent Robert K. Dornan (R) by 984 votes. Dornan had charged that thousands of non-citizens had illegally voted as the result of a conspiracy in Orange County by Hispanic organizations.

While Republicans admitted that they failed to come up with enough evidence to overturn the election, they nonetheless claimed that the voter registration process at the local level is under threat from illegally registered non-citizens. Additionally, they attributed the failure of the investigation to noncooperation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and other witnesses.

Vern Ehlers (R-Mich.), who chaired the task force that carried out the investigation, said that the task force identified 624 illegal votes, and another 196 that were suspect, but could not be documented—not enough to overturn the election, assuming all the suspect votes were for Sanchez.

The Democrats, as they had been

throughout most of 1997, continued to charge the GOP with intimidating Hispanic voters. Sanchez said, "In the coming days the [Oversight] committee intends to have these suspects purged from the voting rolls despite overwhelming evidence that the vast majority were legal voters last November."

Steny Hoyer (Md.), the lone Democrat on the task force, charged that the investigation was conducted in a partisan, secret manner. "It is incomprehensible to me," he said, "that I come to the well of this House with absolutely no idea how the majority reached its findings. Although I am a full member of the task force, I have yet to see the list of names behind the numbers on the majority's report."

After the resolution was passed, Republicans tried to ramrod through a bill entitled the "Voter Eligibility Verification Pilot Program Act of 1998." Democrats claimed the bill would be a threat to the Voting Rights Act and the so-called "motor voter act" passed in 1993. John Lewis (D-Ga.) said, "Like the poll tax, like the literacy test, this bill is intended to keep people from participating in our political process. . . . It harks back to another period, a dark period in our history." The vote was 210-200, short of the two-thirds required to pass it under suspension of the rules.

Line item veto ruled unconstitutional

On Feb. 12, U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan ruled that the line item veto, one of the crown jewels of the Republican "Contract on America," is unconstitutional. Hogan wrote that the law "violates the procedural requirements ordained in Article I of the United States Constitu-

tion and impermissibly upsets the balance of powers so carefully prescribed by its Framers."

On the Senate floor, Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), the leading opponent of the Line Item Veto Act when it was passed in 1996, called Hogan's decision "a victory for the American people. It is their Constitution, it is their Republic, and their liberties that have been made more secure."

Hogan's ruling will be appealed to the Supreme Court, but at least one Republican has changed his mind about it. Robert Bennett (R-Utah), in remarks following Byrd's, referred to his support for the line item veto in 1996 and said, "I have seen it become a source of mischief here in this body . . . and, it may be that I will have to eat a little crow. . . . I believe the arguments . . . are sufficiently persuasive that I need to make this apology and this recanting of a previous position."

NATO expansion treaty arrives in the Senate

The Clinton administration transmitted the Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO, to the Senate on Feb. 11. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said in a press conference that day, that he expects the debate to take place in late March and that it will be "one of the most critical foreign policy debates that we will see this decade."

Daschle expressed confidence that the treaty will be ratified by a large majority. "I believe," he said, "that this is a time of great import not only to NATO countries, but to the United States, and we hope to recognize that, by showing true bipartisanship when it comes to the expansion of NATO."