

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Senate Leaders Agree on Power-Sharing Arrangement

Two days after the 107th Congress convened on Jan. 3, Senate Democratic and Republican leaders came to an agreement on how they will share power in a body divided 50/50 between the two parties. Republican Leader Trent Lott (Miss.) and Democratic Leader Tom Daschle (S.D.), who will act as Majority Leader until Jan. 20, appeared together on Jan. 5 to explain the agreement.

The agreement provides for equal membership on committees, and includes a special procedure to discharge committees of consideration of legislation or a nomination if there should be a tie vote. Lott said that this guarantees that "a bill or a nominee cannot be killed at a subcommittee level or even at the committee level." What is not addressed in the agreement, is the conduct of conference committees. Lott said that, basically, the two sides decided to stick with current rules, which provide Democrats the option of filibustering or amending the appointment of Senate conferees.

The agreement, in the form of a resolution, was passed by voice vote on the Senate floor. Speculation has been rife around Washington, however, that the deal was struck after Democrats agreed to not object to the Florida electoral slate when the Electoral College votes were counted the following day. Of course, the deal goes by the wayside, should the composition of the Senate change due to resignation or death of a Senator. In that vein, there has been speculation that the next Senator to die could be either Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) or Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), because of health problems and advanced age. The governors of both states, who would appoint someone to fill out the term, are Democrats.

New House Rules Rankle Democrats

Moments after confirming Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) as Speaker of the House on Jan. 3, Republicans rammed through changes in the House Rules that left Democrats fuming. The new package, as described by Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier (R-Calif.), provides for a new Financial Services Committee, which replaces the Banking Committee, and takes jurisdiction over securities that had originally been held by the Commerce Committee, which is now redesignated the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Dreier explained that this "reflects the coordinated and comprehensive approach to financial services that is emerging in the wake" of the repeal of the Glass-Steagal banking regulation law, last year. The package also included a host of minor technical changes, but it was the committee realignment and committee ratios that caused the most heartburn.

Joe Moakley (D-Mass.), the ranking member on the Rules Committee, said that because of the election results, "the only mandate this Congress and the White House have is to put aside our differences and get things done. But that mandate of cooperation is not reflected in this Republican rules package." He showed that if the committee ratios reflected the 221 to 211 ratio of Republicans to Democrats, Democrats would get 58 more committee seats than they are now.

John Dingell (D-Mich.), long the ranking member on the Commerce Committee, warned that moving securities jurisdiction to the former Banking Committee is asking for trouble. He said that in the 60 or 70 years that the Commerce Committee has exercised oversight, "there has never been a scandal in that particular line of juris-

dition." However, he said, the Banking Committee "has presided over some splendid scandals in the area of banking and savings and loans and has never understood what was going on." These scandals cost taxpayers at least \$500 billion "because of the incompetence and indifference of that committee." Dingell warned the GOP, "You have made your choice of fools and I should say that you should now look forward to a splendid disaster."

Dingell also complained of restrictions on Democrats' ability to complain about legislation in committee reports. He warned that "this is not the way that you begin the affairs of this Congress," given the questions surrounding the conduct of last November's Presidential election and all the talk about bipartisan cooperation.

McCain Readies Push for Campaign Finance Reform

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who unsuccessfully sought the GOP Presidential nomination, is wasting no time putting his number-one legislative priority on the table. On Jan. 4, he appeared at a press conference, flanked by Sens. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) and Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), to announce that the three of them would be making campaign finance reform a top priority in the 107th Congress. He said, "We think the best time to address it in a bipartisan fashion would be . . . when the confirmation hearings and nominations are going on, before the Bush legislative agenda comes to the Hill."

McCain couldn't say exactly what form the legislation would take, but that it would likely include some kind of a ban on so-called soft money.

Cochran targeted independent groups in election campaigns, which,

compared to candidates' campaigns, he said, have almost no restrictions on them. "We're almost defenseless under the rules that now exist," he said. "That's one reason why I'm interested in being a part of this campaign reform effort."

McCain expressed confidence that there are now at least 59 votes for a reform bill. "Obviously," he said, "we need to get to the magic 60, and I believe today the dam will break and that campaign finance reform will pass." Cochran was coy, however, when he was asked whether he was the sixtieth vote. "I will support this legislative vehicle," he said, though he wants to see it enlarged to strengthen disclosure requirements.

Gephardt Falls for Tax-Cut Schemes

Hours before the 107th Congress opened on Jan. 3, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) indicated that the Democrats would now be more open to some form of compromise with Republicans on tax cuts, than they have been in the past. Appearing on NBC's "Today Show" on Jan. 3, Gephardt said, "I think we need a tax cut. . . . I don't know the exact size. It may be that it has to get bigger because the recession is looming and we've got economic worries out there."

President-elect George W. Bush has been pushing for a \$1.3 trillion tax-cut package, similar to ones vetoed by President Clinton in recent years. While the Democrats won't go for one that large, temporary Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) indicated, later the same afternoon, that one half as large might be acceptable. "It isn't just the size," he said, "it's how we do it, whether or not we're

going to be able to help those people who really need it." The kinds of tax cuts Daschle thinks the Democrats could find agreement on include the marriage penalty and estate taxes, and credits for education.

Meanwhile, the next day, Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.) inserted into the *Congressional Record*, figures from the Congressional Budget Office and the U.S. Budget, showing that the total Federal debt is still increasing, if the various trust funds are not counted in the budget figures. In fiscal year 2000, the Federal debt increased by \$85 billion. Hollings called the claims of a huge budget surplus, "Monkeyshine."

House GOP Shuffles Committee Chairmanships

On Jan. 4, the term-limitation axe fell on veteran House Republicans who have been committee chairmen since the GOP takeover in 1995, when they changed the House Rules to limit committee chairmanships to six years. The reshuffle resulted in some younger members with new-found power, and some former chairmen out in the cold. The choices were made by a 25-member Republican steering committee overseen by Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) and Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), neither of whom were subject to any term limits.

The most surprising result was the choice of Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) to succeed the retired Bill Archer (R-Tex.) as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Most pundits had expected that gavel to go to Phil Crane (R-Ill.), who has more seniority, and comes from the same state as Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.). Crane will apparently be allowed to retain chairmanship of the Trade subcommittee,

in spite of the term limitation.

Other changes include Michael Oxley (Ohio) taking over a reorganized Financial Services Committee; Bob Stump (Ariz.) beat out Curt Weldon for Armed Services; Jim Nussle (Iowa) got the Budget Committee; Bill Tauzin (La.), the Commerce Committee; and John Boehner (Ohio), the Education and Workforce Committee. Henry Hyde (Ill.) moves over from Judiciary to International Relations; James Sensenbrenner (Wisc.) moves from Science to Judiciary, James Hansen (Utah) got Resources; Sherwood Boehlert (N.Y.) takes over the Science Committee; Don Young (Ak.) moves from Resources to Transportation; and Chris Smith (N.J.) gets Veterans Affairs.

At least one former chairman was unhappy at the outcome. Former Transportation Committee Chairman Bud Shuster (Pa.), shortly before the chairmanships were confirmed by the full GOP caucus, citing health concerns, announced his resignation from the House, effective at the end of January. During his six years as chairman, he gained a reputation for bringing billions of additional Federal dollars into the nation's transportation system, which brought him much bipartisan support, but also got him into trouble with the GOP leadership, especially Armey and DeLay, on more than one occasion.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democratic caucus announced that Jim Traficant (D-Ohio) would not be seated on any committees, essentially ejecting him from the Democratic Caucus, because he voted for Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) for Speaker, rather than Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.). It has been reported that Traficant is not interested in switching to the Republican Party, and may remain an independent.