National News

Hagel: Solutions Can't Wait Until Next Election

Expected by some to announce the formation of an exploratory committee, Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) announced on March 12 that he will hold off on any decision about a Presidential bid. The conservative senator is the Republican who is most adamant in his opposition to the war in Iraq. "America's response to the challenges and opportunities that confront us today will define our future. Finding solutions to these challenges and capitalizing on these opportunities will not wait until the next election."

After citing his work on other issues, Hagel said in a press conference at the University of Nebraska, "America is facing its most divisive and difficult issue since Vietnam—the war in Iraq, an issue that I have been deeply involved in. I want to keep my focus on helping [to] find a responsible way out of this tragedy, and not divert my energy, efforts, and judgment with competing political considerations."

In staying out of the Presidential race, at least for now, Hagel joins fellow Vietnam vet Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) in a minority of possible contenders who have opted to focus on the crises at hand rather than entering the Fantasy Politics League.

AFL-CIO Endorses Plan For Medicare for All

In an extensive statement issued March 6, the AFL-CIO's Executive Council vowed, "We will mobilize our members to build support for bold, meaningful, and comprehensive reform and work to pass legislation that assures everyone affordable, comprehensive coverage. We will recruit employers to join us in achieving universal coverage. And we will evaluate the health proposals of candidates for President in 2008 based on the test we have outlined and their capacity to make meaningful change to meet this urgent goal." In the meantime, the council called on Congress to enact a "Medicare for All" system now.

Medicare for All is the name being given the legislation proposed by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), which provides for a single-payer universal health-care system.

In contrast, Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) recently told the *Los Angeles Times,* that a single-payer health insurance system is "unlikely. I don't think Americans have a great trust of government in general. I think things like [Hurricane] Katrina and Walter Reed don't make people feel comfortable that government's going to solve their problems. I think single-payer would be the most efficient system, but I think Americans want to have an American solution, not a Canadian solution."

Friedmanites Target The Sarbanes-Oxley Bill

Wild Friedmanite ideologues are behind the attempt to repeal Sarbanes-Oxley, the bill against corporate fraud that Congress passed after the Enron scandal. Two days after Dick Cheney and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson convened a semi-secret meeting to stop moves for government control over financial speculation, Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), and Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.) held a conference call to demand "reform" of Sarbanes-Oxley.

Cutting through the sophistry that "We cannot fiddle while American capital burns," about how regulation has made New York "Number Two" behind London as the stock exchange for initial public offerings, one of the bill's cosponsors let the cat out of the bag: London is behind this move. Rep. Tom Feeney (R-Tex.) first praised Milton Friedman as the greatest American economist, and then quoted him as the authority who warned that Sarbanes-Oxley is a disaster which has "terrorized" U.S. corporations from taking risks in expanding, growing, etc. Later Feeney said that in both Hong Kong and London, financiers "are laughing at us." He said that "the joke in London is that they are erecting a statue to Sarbanes, and one to Oxley" to thank them for making London the number one in "worldwide capital." The same thing happened in Hong Kong, where a CFO of a major firm "laughed at me, and patted me on the back" when he asked if Asian companies would list their stocks in New York.

Senate Defeats Resolution On Troop Withdrawals

On March 15, the U.S. Senate voted down the Democrats' resolution for troop withdrawals from Iraq, after a day of debate on the Senate floor. The vote was 48 in favor of the Resolution, and 50 against, generally split along party lines. Democratic Senators Mark Pryor (Ark.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.) voted with the Republicans, while Republican Senator Gordon Smith (Ore.) with the Democrats. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) voted with the Republicans.

Two other resolutions, both non-binding, were voted up by the Senate after the troop-withdrawal vote. A pabulum resolution by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) was passed 96-2; the bill declares that the President and the Congress have shared responsibilities regarding the armed forces, and declares that Congress will support the troops by providing equipment and training before they deploy, and veteran services and health care on their return. Another non-binding resolution, from Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), passed 82-16; the bill expresses Congress's intent that no funds should be cut off or reduced for American troops in the field.

House Passes Bill for Contracting Accountability

On March 15, the House passed, by a vote of 347 to 73, the Accountability in Contracting Act to require agencies to limit the use of abuse-prone contracts, to increase transparency and accountability in Federal contracting. The act also limits to one year the duration of no-bid contracts awarded in emergencies. The bill was introduced by House Oversight and Government Reform Committee chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and had been reported out of his committee by unanimous consent.