

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Indictments handed down in House Post Office flap

A federal grand jury handed down an indictment against the former manager of the House Post Office, Joanna O'Rourke, on Sept. 10, on charges that House Post Office employees engaged in a conspiracy to defraud the government and that they used taxpayer funds to benefit members of Congress. The indictment came one day after prosecutors reached an agreement with O'Rourke under which she will plead guilty to two misdemeanors and cooperate with the grand jury investigation of the Post Office.

The indictment of O'Rourke signals that the prosecutor, U.S. Attorney Jay Stephens, is close to charging one or more members of Congress with criminal wrongdoing.

The indictment charges O'Rourke with ordering House postal employees to pick up and deliver campaign contributions, send improper express mail shipments, and, in one instance, using the Post Office's stamp to backdate the postmark on a federal income tax return.

Three congressmen have acknowledged receiving subpoenas: House Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), Rep. Austin Murphy (D-Pa.), and Rep. Joseph Kolter (D-Pa.). The members, who have invoked their Fifth Amendment rights, have had their office and postage expense records subpoenaed.

Anti-incumbent fever taking its toll

The anti-incumbent fever sweeping the country has already made itself felt in primary elections throughout the country. Earlier in the year, Sen. Alan Dixon (D-Ill.) was defeated in his primary by Carol Moseley Braun.

On Sept. 8, relatively unknown

Wisconsin state senator Russell Feingold defeated five-term Rep. James Moody (D-Wisc.) for the Democratic nomination to challenge Sen. Robert Kasten (R-Wisc.) in the Wisconsin Senate race. Feingold received a whopping 70% of the vote, while Moody and businessman Joe Checota each received just 14%.

In Oklahoma, Rep. Mickey Edwards (R) could only rally 26% of the vote in his Aug. 25 primary, coming in last in a three-way race. Edwards was the fourth-ranking Republican in the House.

Space Station funds voted up

The Senate voted on Sept. 9 to continue funding for Space Station Freedom. An amendment by Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.), which would have eliminated funding for Freedom, was defeated in a vote of 63-34.

The \$2.1 billion earmarked by the Senate for the Space Station is \$840 million less than the Bush administration had requested but \$400 million more than the sum approved by the House in July. Differences in the two bills will be worked out in conference committee.

Because of budget pressures, the design of Freedom has been reworked numerous times. Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Space Station, said the project had already generated 75,000 jobs.

Sen. Jake Garn (R-Utah), who flew on a Shuttle mission, and who will be leaving the Senate this year, noted that his biggest disappointment was "the shortsightedness of the Congress, the willingness to vote for things that give immediate political benefit, but the unwillingness to vote for something that

may not bear fruit for 10, 12, 15, 20 years down the road."

Bumpers's alternative to building the Space Station was renting space on the Russian Mir Space Station.

House, Senate move to lift MFN status for Serbia

A resolution introduced into the Senate on Sept. 9 would condition the granting of Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to Serbia and Montenegro on the President's certification to Congress that these countries had stopped supporting armed conflict in the Balkans. The resolution was introduced by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), and Sens. James Sasser (D-Tenn.), James Jeffords (R-Vt.), Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), and Warren Rudman (R-N.H.).

The conditions for continuing MFN status include provisions that Serbia halt support for Serbian forces inside Bosnia-Herzegovina and make significant progress toward complying with the internationally recognized human rights clauses of the Helsinki Final Act, including respect for minority rights in Kosovo and Vojvodina.

The resolution also demands that Serbia and Montenegro respect the borders of the six republics of former Yugoslavia as determined by the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, i.e., before the Serbs initiated their invasion and "ethnic cleansing."

Similar legislation in the House, which has 115 sponsors, is expected to be introduced shortly by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.). The Wolf legislation also calls on the parties to return to the original boundaries of the region, and calls for the placement of U.N. peacekeeping forces on the borders of Kosovo and Vojvodina. Wolf recently

returned from a fact-finding mission in former Yugoslavia.

Martin concedes NAFTA will cost U.S. jobs

Labor Secretary Lynne Martin conceded under intensive grilling before the Senate Finance Committee on Sept. 10, that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) could eliminate up to 150,000 U.S. jobs. Martin became the first Bush administration official to admit that NAFTA will result in a major loss of jobs in the United States.

The cat slipped out of the bag when committee members pressed Martin on how the administration came up with a figure of \$330 million a year for five years for retraining workers once NAFTA goes into effect. Martin eventually responded that it was based on the possible loss of 150,000 jobs over 10 years, which she claimed was the highest estimate among 20 studies reviewed by the Labor Department. Under further questioning, she acknowledged that the AFL-CIO has predicted the loss of 500,000 jobs, but said the department had not included organized labor's estimate in its review.

Meanwhile, two supporters of a free trade agreement with Mexico have indicated that the agreement has little chance of passage in its present form.

In a speech on Sept. 9 before a coalition of labor and environmental groups opposed to the pact, House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) called on the Bush administration to "cease further efforts to win congressional approval" of the NAFTA agreement and to return to the negotiating table to revise the agreement in order to include provisions for protecting workers and the environment.

In testimony before the Senate Fi-

nance Committee on Sept. 9, U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills rejected any suggestion that the agreement be altered.

Another member of the "free trade" faction, Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), also attacked the agreement. In floor statements on Sept. 8, he called the agreement "flawed" and accused the administration of "using NAFTA for partisan political advantage."

Senate votes to revoke MFN for China

By unanimous consent, the Senate passed a measure which would revoke Most Favored Nation status for trade with Chinese state-owned industries. The bill does not limit MFN for private companies and joint venture companies in which American businesses are working. The Bush administration has opposed any restrictions on China's MFN status.

The bill, introduced by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), would allow continued MFN status for China only if it met a number of stringent conditions. China must begin adhering to its commitment to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights in China and Tibet, it must allow unrestricted emigration of persons, and it must provide an accounting of citizens detained, accused, or sentenced since the Tiananmen Square massacre. China must also demonstrate a good faith effort to release those imprisoned for their non-violent expression of political beliefs, and it must act to stop the export of products made by forced labor to the United States.

In addition, the legislation requires that the Chinese government cease religious persecution and repression in China and Tibet, cease unfair trade practices with the United

States, and abide by the Missile Technology Control regime.

In a separate bill introduced on Sept. 14 by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), China would be required to cooperate with the United States in efforts to account for U.S. military personnel missing in action or otherwise unaccounted for as a result of their service in the Korean or Vietnam conflicts.

Gonzalez exposes secret U.S. relations with Iraq

Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) presented more specifics on secret U.S.-Iraq relations prior to the Persian Gulf war, in comments on the House floor Sept. 14. The most significant part of the allegations was the manner in which the U.S. Justice Department intervened into the criminal investigation of the Atlanta branch of the Italian Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), fingered as the financial funnel for illicit funds going to an Iraqi military program.

Gonzalez noted how executives of the bank had turned to U.S. Ambassador to Italy Peter Secchia in 1990 to try to get the U.S. government to intervene to control the investigation. Gonzalez said that shortly after Secchia had sent a dispatch voicing these concerns to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Attorney's office in Atlanta had reassigned the lead prosecutor to another case for the entire summer of 1990, and control of the investigation was transferred to Washington.

Gonzalez condemned the Justice Department's interference in his investigation, including threats to subpoena him for revealing classified information, as "corrupting and abdicating and frustrating the very oath of office and constitutional responsibilities inherent in those officials and in those positions."