

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

### Grassley asks crop relief for Midwest farmers

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) has introduced S. 1214, which would provide some relief for farmers who have been unable to plant because of the flooding in the Midwest.

Grassley said that the bill "would allow farmers who had earlier purchased crop insurance but did not elect the prevented planting rider to retroactively purchase a prevented planting option. For producers who did not purchase crop insurance this year, they can retroactively purchase a policy as well. Finally, for producers who planted corn, but had to switch to soybeans, those farmers would get to keep their corn level of indemnity after soybean income has been subtracted."

"The benefits of this plan are many," said Grassley. "It will probably provide producers with higher benefits than they would receive under disaster relief. And that relief would be provided more quickly. This legislation will also cover future disasters during this crop year."

### Withdraw combat forces from Somalia, says Byrd

On July 14, Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), in remarks on the Senate floor, called for the removal of all U.S. forces from Somalia, whether or not they're a part of the U.N. operation. Byrd complained that "missions of food relief have now taken a back seat to participation in conflict with local warlords," a task which "was never the Senate's intent" when they approved the presence of U.S. forces in Somalia. Byrd noted that the U.S. contingent was recently reinforced but that the Senate was not asked to okay that reinforcement. "The Senate has not bought into a police action against

Somali warlords," he said. "I have not cast my vote to do that."

The U.N. operation, which has turned into a witchhunt for General Aideed, has triggered violent anti-American feelings in Somalia and caused the first major conflict with a U.N. ally, Italy, which has refused to dismiss an Italian general whom the U.N. claimed had defied the U.N. command.

"I do not see anywhere in our U.S. Constitution that this Senate is bound to go along with a U.N. operation that appears to be getting us deeper and deeper into a war in which we have no business," Byrd said.

Sen. Larry Pressler (R-S.D.) also warned, "We should disengage as quickly as possible. It is going to get worse," he said. "If troops stay there, they should be U.N. multi-country forces, and our troops should not take the lead. We are going to be accused of killing people, and we are going to have claims against the United States."

Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), chairman of the Appropriations Military Subcommittee, is quietly organizing support among committee chairmen who oversee military and foreign policy to require congressional approval of humanitarian missions involving the military.

### Republican attack on Gonzalez fizzles

House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) has decided that there is no need for any disciplinary action against Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call* reported. Republican leaders Bob Michel (Ill.) and Newt Gingrich (Ga.), had tried to get Foley to reprimand him.

Gonzalez, in one of his speeches

during the designated "special orders," criticized the Republican-instituted "pledge of allegiance" at the beginning of each day's legislative session. Gonzalez, who commented that the real pledge congressmen took was to the U.S. Constitution, said they were acting "like a good little herd, reminiscent of the Hitlerian period: 'Sieg heil, Sieg heil,'" in repeating the pledge, but ignoring the substance of their oaths.

### McCain seeks end to aid to Nicaragua

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) called on July 16 for the cessation of aid to Nicaragua. The call was prompted by a *Washington Post* exposé of Nicaraguan-sponsored terrorism. McCain said that "those of us who supported freedom and democracy and aid to the Contras are again vindicated by the clear record of what the Sandinistas were doing with the help of Cuba and others. Recent events are an indication that the subversion continues."

He charged that President Violeta Chamorro's government, "led by Minister Antonio Lacayo," has "ceded all of its real authority to the Sandinistas." He cited the retention of Humberto Ortega, brother of former President Daniel Ortega, as defense chief, as forewarning that this would happen.

McCain claimed that the Sandinistas continue to export terror and subversion, "posing an incredible danger to the lives of innocent people as evidenced by the uncovered stockpile of surface-to-air missiles." He urged the Clinton administration to freeze all further assistance until "an international body has investigated the crimes that have been revealed." He added that such a body should include the FBI.

He failed to mention that the deal between Chamorro and Lacayo was arranged by the Bush administration through U.S. favorite, Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez.

## **R**districting ruling irks black legislators

In four additional states, the controversial U.S. Supreme Court decision calling into question the legality of recent redrawing of congressional districts is causing political turmoil. The decision has opened the road for legal challenges to the new districts which were set up to provide more proportional representation for minorities.

After a Supreme Court decision on a case in North Carolina, a lawsuit from last year was re-opened on June 29, challenging the district of black congressman Cleo Fields (D-La.). And in South Carolina at the beginning of July, a three-judge federal panel erased court-ordered congressional and legislative districts and gave the state legislature until April to produce its own map.

Despite the Supreme Court ruling, the Alabama Democratic Conference is pressing for a second black majority district, and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund has sought a third Hispanic district in New York City, where one of every four residents is Spanish-speaking.

## **E**lders nomination comes under fire

President Clinton's nomination of Dr. Joycelyn Elders to Surgeon General of the United States has come under attack on Capitol Hill, leading to a postponement of her confirmation hearings. So far, the administration says that it still stands strongly behind

the nomination.

Elders has received support from many Democrats and from the Congressional Black Caucus, but her policies have sparked opposition. Elders was to have testified before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on July 13, but the hearing was postponed one week as accusations were leveled of financial irregularities in her management role in the National Bank of Arkansas.

Elders, who is black, has been the director of the Arkansas State Health Department since 1987. She is being attacked for her strong pro-abortion policies, her support for early sex education in schools, and her desire to make condoms available in high school clinics, albeit with the permission of parents. She has also supported the controversial Norplant birth-control program.

Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), in statements on the Senate floor on July 16, said, "While she may be a very fine physician and a very able advocate for a political agenda, Dr. Elders has an agenda that can be fairly described as extreme." Nickles pointed to statements Elders had made before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee in 1990, where she commented positively on the fact that the increase in abortions had led to a decrease in Down's syndrome infants in Washington State.

## **S**enate panel cuts intelligence budget

The Senate Intelligence Committee voted on July 16 to freeze intelligence spending at last year's level, rejecting heavy administration lobbying for a 5% increase to the nation's intelligence agencies. The vote removes \$700 million from the CIA and the government's non-military espionage

agencies, and \$600 million from military intelligence agencies, from Clinton's proposed budget.

Later in the year, the Senate might be asked to vote on a proposal to make the total budget figure public, a move which is being justified by the supposed "end of the Cold War." The Senate Armed Services Committee, which has a rarely exercised prerogative over intelligence, is considering making even further cuts in the budget.

## **R**ostenkowski resurfaces in House Bank probe

As President Clinton begins to focus in on the budget reconciliation bill, one of the two key negotiators for Democrats, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), is again besieged by scandal—feeding hopes that the incompetent, austerity-based deal could still be blocked.

On July 19, former Postmaster of the House of Representatives Robert Rota reached a plea-bargain with prosecutors, pleading guilty to three misdemeanor counts of conspiracy and embezzlement and acknowledging that he had helped an undisclosed number of representatives steal tens of thousands of dollars for almost 20 years. Although Rota did not name any names, he did reveal payments to an unnamed congressman whom publicly available records show to be Rostenkowski. Under House rules, Rostenkowski would have to step down if he were indicted.

On July 20, Clinton and Vice President Al Gore met with House Democrats on the budget reconciliation. The President has indicated that he now favors the 4.3¢ per gallon gasoline tax increase which was contained in the Senate version of the budget package.