

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Democrats slow tort reform legislation

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) failed even to get a majority, much less the 60 votes needed to close debate, for a measure that would significantly limit punitive damages in civil lawsuits, a measure acclaimed as a part of the Conservative Revolution's Contract with America. President Clinton had vowed to veto the bill if it were passed, labeling it the "Drunk Drivers Protection Act."

Dole was forced to scale back the legislation, limiting punitive damages only in product liability suits, and that only to twice the level of other damages. The scaled-back version goes little further than bipartisan legislation introduced earlier by Sens. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) and Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.).

### Helms targets State Department, aid programs

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a letter to Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), unveiled proposed cuts in foreign aid contained in the International Affairs authorization bill prepared by his committee. The bill would eliminate nearly \$100 million a year in funding for the International Labor Organization, the U.N. Industrial Development Association, and four smaller agencies, and cut \$200 million from almost every other U.N.-sponsored organization except Unicef. Topping the list are the controversial U.N. Development Program, the U.N. Population Fund, the Montreal Protocol Multilateral Fund, and the U.N. Environment Fund.

The proposal comes as U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is preparing to announce a streamlining

of the Department of State, which will cut 500 jobs and make the department "more flexible," in an attempt to head off another bill by Helms which would eliminate 30 top posts and cut \$3 billion a year from the department's \$21 billion budget, according to the May 6 *New York Times*.

Although the cuts in the U.N. programs are justifiable, the proposed cuts in foreign aid programs would cause serious misery. The Africa Development Fund, for instance, which provides direct U.S. assistance to some of the most devastated nations in Africa, will be severely cut if Helms has his way.

The House International Relations Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations have scheduled hearings during the second week of May to examine measures to cut foreign operations, although, according to Capitol Hill sources, the House committee is not expected to go as far as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The American Foreign Service Association, an association of foreign service employees, is encouraging its members to call their congressmen, as private citizens, in order to warn them against too severe cuts in the foreign aid budget.

### Speaker tries to label Mexico bailout illegal

Upset at the fact that Congress was side-stepped by the Clinton administration in pulling together a Mexican assistance package, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) sent a letter to the White House claiming that the assistance program was "a direct violation of the law." Gingrich warned the President that the "continued legality of your Mexican guaranty program depends directly on your provid-

ing certifications that the conditions specified in the act have been met."

Gingrich claims that the White House is withholding documents relating to the assistance program which it is required to make available in accordance with the Mexican Debt Disclosure Act.

In a letter to Gingrich, White House Counsel Abner Mikva called the accusations "baseless and irresponsible," and said that it was "misleading" for Gingrich to "suggest that the White House is improperly withholding documents from Congress." Mikva offered to let House members look at any sensitive documents that had not already been sent. "Neither you nor any other Member of Congress has accepted my invitation to discuss a mutually acceptable accommodation," he said.

### Dole would move U.S. embassy to Jerusalem

In a measure that will seriously aggravate the already tenuous Mideast peace process, Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) introduced on May 10 the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act, which would move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The measure would mandate the Clinton administration to begin groundbreaking on the new embassy site before the end of 1996.

Dole announced the step in a speech to the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on May 8. Despite its highly inflammatory nature, because the issue of Jerusalem is a major stumbling block in Palestinian-Israeli talks (whose discussion has been postponed to give the peace process breathing room), the bill is expected to attract strong support in the House and overwhelming support in

the Senate.

Dole claimed that such action by Congress would not upset the peace process. "We think this legislation is responsible and will not interfere with the peace process," he said.

In another provocative measure, in 1996 the Jerusalem city government, under Likud Mayor Ehud Olmert, will celebrate the 3,000th anniversary of the capture of the city by the Jews and the naming of the city by King David. For the sake of achieving an agreement with the Palestinians, the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has agreed to put off discussion of the difficult question of Jerusalem until the final status talks in the Mideast peace process. The Palestinians consider Jerusalem the capital of the Palestinian people. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk warned that if Congress recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, it "would explode the peace process."

Joining Dole is Sen. Al D'Amato (R-N.Y.), whose resolution on Iran pushed the White House to impose a tighter embargo on that country.

## **Gingrich resigns from GOPAC under pressure**

Claiming he was "just too busy," House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) resigned as chairman of GOPAC, the organization that raised millions of dollars for candidate training, and which Gingrich and others say was instrumental in the Republican victories last fall.

The Gingrich resignation comes in the wake of a series of ethics complaints raised against him, which have focused primarily on his activities with GOPAC. Covering his own tracks, Gingrich says that the committee was "clumsy" in its handling of financial disclosure.

During most of Gingrich's tenure as chairman, however, GOPAC did not reveal donors, and the Federal Election Commission sued the committee for failing to register as a federal political action committee while engaging in federal election activity. Gingrich had also resisted calls for GOPAC to disclose all its contributors, arguing that it is not covered by federal disclosure law because most of its resources are devoted to state and local races.

Some of the ethics complaints allege that Gingrich violated House rules by using GOPAC, as well as the tax-exempt Peace and Freedom Foundation that is run by a former GOPAC official, to support a televised college course that Gingrich was giving.

## **Potts appointment hurts anti-terrorist bill**

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), playing upon the distrust that many rural Americans have of the federal government, warned on May 7 that the appointment of Larry Potts as deputy director of the FBI might slow congressional approval of anti-terrorist legislation proposed by the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the Oklahoma bombing.

Potts has come under heavy criticism for his supervision of the raid on the Branch Davidian complex in Waco, Texas in April 1993, and the bloody encounter with white separatist Randall Weaver in Idaho in August 1992 that left two civilians and one U.S. marshal dead.

Potts was cleared of any wrongdoing in the Waco raid, but was censured by Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick for overruling the FBI's "deadly force" policy and ordering snipers to attack any armed civilians at Weaver's cabin. An FBI sharpshooter

killed Weaver's wife as she stood in the doorway of her home cradling her 10-month-old child. Potts denied approving the orders that led to Mrs. Weaver's death, but two senior agents at the site said in sworn statements that Potts personally approved an order that deadly force "could and should" be used against armed men at the cabin.

A Senate judiciary subcommittee plans to hold hearings on the FBI's internal review of the Waco incident.

## **GOP senators protest extension of ABM Treaty**

Fifty Republican senators, led by Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.), wrote to President Clinton the first week in May, urging him not to proceed with plans to indefinitely extend the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty during his summit meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow.

According to an AP wire on May 4, Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) explained the senators' letter to reporters: "We should be seeking a cooperative transition away from the treaty and its Cold War philosophy of mutual vulnerability rather than trying to extend and reinforce it. At a minimum, we must ensure that the ABM Treaty not interfere with the development and deployment of highly effective theater missile defense."

Republicans are also pushing for more money to be spent on a ground-based national missile defense system. Gen. Malcolm R. O'Neill, the head of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization at the Pentagon (the successor to the Strategic Defense Initiative Office), in replying to the GOP letter, said that the ABM Treaty will not interfere with U.S. plans for theater missile defense "for an extended period of time."