

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Dorgan introduces bill to repeal NAFTA

On Nov. 16, Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) introduced a bill to provide for renegotiation of provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and to mandate the withdrawal of the United States from NAFTA if certain conditions are not met. "The North American Free Trade Act has been a total disaster for our nation. Virtually all the promises made when it was passed have turned out to be hollow and shallow rhetoric," Dorgan said, in remarks inserted into the *Congressional Record*. He called NAFTA a "lemon," and "when we get a lemon we take it back. We demand that the promises made when it was sold be kept. If not, then our only choice is to withdraw from NAFTA."

Dorgan's bill would require the President to renegotiate three "critical areas of failure": trade deficits, currency exchange rates, and agricultural trade distortions. He said that the U.S. trade deficit with Mexico had plunged from a \$5.7 billion surplus in 1992 to at least a \$15 billion deficit by the end of this year. "One of the underlying reasons" for this, he said, "has been the devaluation of the Mexican peso." He said that job losses because of NAFTA may be as high as 300,000 by the end of this year.

Watt attacks 'killer' Republican budget bill

On Nov. 17, Melvin Watt (D-N.C.) used the strongest language yet heard on the House floor to attack the Republican "Balanced Budget Act," the conference report on the reconciliation bill passed earlier by both Houses which contains all of the Republican reforms, including \$270 billion in cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, and \$245 billion in tax cuts for the wealthy.

During debate on H. Res. 272, which provided the rule for the debate on the conference report, Watt said, "The Republicans say that this bill is the culmination of a revolution. I agree, but let me tell you about a revolution. A revolution kills, and this bill kills old people and those on Medicare. It kills poor people and the middle class. It kills young people. It kills sick people. It kills students and it kills the priorities of this nation." The second thing about a revolution is that "you never have a debate about it, and this rule gives us no opportunity to debate it," he said.

About three hours later, Watt returned to the floor to report that he had received "a rash of phone calls from the American people saying that they objected to my use of the word 'killer.' . . . I want the American people and my colleagues to understand that this is a killer bill. The truth cannot be avoided. This bill will kill elderly people, by depriving them of medical care. It will kill young people, by forcing them into poverty and denying them food. It will kill the priorities of our country, which I understand to be compassion."

House bars U.S. troop deployment to Bosnia

On Nov. 17, the House passed a bill to prohibit the use of Defense Department funds to support the deployment of U.S. troops in support of any Bosnia peace agreement without specific approval by Congress.

The bill followed a series of hearings on Bosnia by the House National Security Committee, whose chairman, Floyd Spence (R-S.C.), said during the debate that the Clinton administration had raised more questions than it answered in presenting its case for troop deployment to the

committee. "What we have learned is that the administration has a strategy for putting United States troops into Bosnia, but not for getting them out." He said that "the first rule of peacemaking is to take no sides and make no enemies," but "the United States has already violated that cardinal rule through the application of airpower over the past several months."

Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), speaking in opposition to the bill, said that it "prohibits the President from action as commander in chief." He said that "this bill does jeopardize the peace process." Hamilton warned that the peace negotiations in Dayton, Ohio are at a "very delicate and fragile moment," and Congress "ought not to take any step which would undermine these talks. The parties in Dayton expect the United States to help implement this agreement. They are insisting upon it. This bill states that we will not."

Nigeria targeted by Kassebaum bill

On Nov. 17, Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) and eight cosponsors introduced a bill to impose sanctions on Nigeria, furthering the British-orchestrated attack on that nation. In her remarks, Kassebaum said that until the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others, "the international community had engaged in a policy of limited sanctions and diplomatic engagement," but now, "the situation has reached the point where we simply must respond in a forceful and clear manner."

Kassebaum said that the bill codifies sanctions already in place and adds new ones, including a ban on all new U.S. investment in Nigeria and a freeze on the personal assets of the top officials of the Nigerian regime. The

bill also calls on the international community to suspend Nigeria from international sports competitions and "urges the President to build international support for other actions, including a U.N. arms embargo, a multilateral oil embargo, and a U.N. Human Rights Commission condemnation."

Kassebaum said it was important for the United States to work with "other members of the international community, particularly Great Britain and South Africa, in this effort to promote democratic change."

Democrats remoralized by election results

Some Democrats took notice of the Conservative Revolution landslide that didn't occur in several statewide elections on Nov. 7.

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) suggested that "those who, for months, have been dancing around the bonfire chanting about the death of the Democratic Party . . . and the lasting control of the Republicans in the American political system, might want to take a deep breath and look around at the results of yesterday's elections." He said that even though Democrats were outspent in state races by as much as eight to one, "the Democrats were never outworked, and never will be in our political system."

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) said voters "rejected the extremism of the Gingrich revolution."

Rep. Lewis Payne (D-Va.) said that the message from the Virginia elections was that "people want responsible government, not a radical program that will gut programs that educate our children, protect our seniors, and to help make our communities strong." He compared the Republican Contract with America to the tax

and spending cuts proposed by Gov. George Allen (R), and when "the people of Virginia got a good look at the Allen plan . . . they rejected his extreme program by a big margin."

Breaux ups penalties for powder cocaine running

Sen. John Breaux (D-La.), on Nov. 7, introduced legislation to increase the penalty for trafficking in powder cocaine to the same level as that for crack cocaine. His action comes in the aftermath of a recommendation by the U.S. Sentencing Commission to substantially reduce the penalty for trafficking in crack cocaine, a recommendation which was subsequently rejected by both the Clinton administration and Congress.

Breaux said that even though it takes one-hundredth the amount of crack to get a five- or ten-year sentence as for powder cocaine, "the damage caused by these criminal acts is the same. Lives are lost, families are destroyed, careers are ruined, and our nation itself is seriously threatened. . . . Tough penalties are necessary to send a clear signal that the United States will not tolerate selling illegal drugs."

"The answer to the problem presented by this wide difference in penalties is not to lower penalties for selling crack cocaine but to increase the penalties for selling powder cocaine," he said.

Alaska Power Admin. sell-off okayed by House

On Nov. 8, the House passed, by a vote of 289-134, the conference report on a Senate bill to sell the Alaska Power Administration (APA) hydroelectric project. The sale of the APA is the leading edge of the Conservative

Revolution agenda to sell off all federal government-owned infrastructure, although this is probably the only sale that will go through prior to the 1996 elections.

Even though the debate on the House floor focused on the export of Alaskan crude oil and deep water drilling royalty relief, Scott Klug (R-Wisc.) touted wildly exaggerated supposed fiscal benefits of the sale. He claimed that the sale of the APA would net the federal government \$73 million, and, "if we manage to move those 130 other dams located and stretched across the country from the Tennessee Valley up to the Pacific Northwest, we can literally bring billions and billions of dollars into the federal Treasury and also eliminate nearly one-third of the bureaucracy at the Department of Energy."

GOP 'rising star' tarnished by scandal

The first freshman in 70 years to win a seat on the House Rules Committee, Enid Greene Waldholtz (R-Utah), has become tarnished by a scandal involving her husband. Joseph Waldholtz is under investigation for an alleged check-kiting scheme in which he wrote checks for \$228,000 more than was in his account. There are allegations that he may also have stolen as much as \$2 million from accounts managed by him and his wife, including one for her 1994 campaign.

Enid Waldholtz, who is blaming the couple's financial problems on her husband, filed for divorce on Nov. 14. However, the Department of Justice investigation broadened to include her after Joseph Waldholtz surrendered to the FBI on Nov. 17. Former campaign workers have reportedly told authorities that she knew of the campaign's financial irregularities.