

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Kennedy, Gray introduce anti-sweatshops bill

On Sept. 25, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. William Gray (D-Mo.) introduced a bill to "crack down on the exploitation of garment workers by unscrupulous clothing manufacturers," in Kennedy's words. The bill would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act to make manufacturers liable for violations by their contractors. Manufacturers are defined to include retailers such as Wal-Mart and K-Mart, which have clothing lines manufactured for them by outside contractors.

Kennedy said, "Our goal is to encourage more manufacturers to use their economic power to see that garment workers are treated fairly." He said that "of the 22,000 firms that produce clothing and accessories in the United States, it is estimated that more than half pay below the minimum wage, and a third expose their workers to serious safety and health risks."

Clay said, "Introducing this bill now focuses vital attention on a critical problem as we enter the culmination of this campaign." He promised to make it a legislative priority in the 105th Congress.

Immigration bill clears House, Senate

The "Immigration in the National Interest Act" conference report was passed by the House Sept. 25 and the Senate Sept. 30, after the Gallegly amendment, authorizing states to deny public education to the children of illegal aliens, was removed. The amendment was considered separately in the House and passed by a vote of 254-175. The Senate took no action on it.

In the House debate, Lamar Smith (R-Tex.) blamed just about every so-

cial and economic problem in the United States on illegal aliens. Smith claimed that the bill will "lower the crime rate, lower the cost of imprisoning illegal aliens, and make our communities safer places to live."

Democrats complained that the conference report was negotiated by the Republicans in secret, and that it was a different bill from the one that passed the House and Senate by wide margins last summer. John Bryant (D-Tex.) complained that the bill essentially takes employers off the hook for knowingly hiring illegal aliens by not including additional funding for wage and hour inspectors in the Department of Labor. Bryant argued that half of illegal aliens come into the country legally, then overstay their visas. "The only way you are going to find [them]," he said, "is with wage and hour inspectors," because most employers of illegal aliens also violate wage and hour laws.

Short-cut taken to wrap up spending bills

The Congress finished off the appropriations process for fiscal year 1996, when the Senate passed an omnibus spending bill just hours before the fiscal year ended on Sept. 30. The \$600 billion budget bill wrapped up the six remaining spending measures, including funding for the departments of Defense, Interior, Commerce, Justice, State, Treasury, and Health and Human Services, and several independent agencies. The House had passed the bill by voice vote on Sept. 28.

Republicans gave in to most of the demands of Congressional Democrats and the Clinton administration. The bill contains about \$6.5 billion more in social spending than the Republicans

wanted, but they didn't want to risk another showdown with Clinton; they were also anxious to get back to their districts to campaign for reelection. There were funding increases for education, anti-drug and other domestic programs, and anti-terrorism measures.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) attributed the Republicans' willingness to compromise to the election season. "'We're going to agree with you on all of these issues, so you can't use them against us, as you did last year,'" Daschle said, characterizing the GOP attitude. "That, combined with the fact that they wanted to leave town worse than anybody I've seen in all the time I've been in Congress, is the reason they've been as compliant as they are," he said.

Despite the budget agreement, the Senate was not able to adjourn on Sept. 30 as planned, because of a dispute over a labor relations provision in the Federal Aviation Administration authorization bill.

Brown offers plan to boost research funding

Ranking House Science Committee member George Brown (D-Calif.) proposed to boost federal funding for research and development, at a discussion with reporters Sept. 25.

Brown said that members customarily brag about what's been accomplished, "but we haven't accomplished a hell of a lot," under the leadership of Committee Chairman Robert Walker (R-Pa.). Brown said that R&D would have been devastated in the last two budgets (fiscal years 1996 and 1997) promulgated under the Republican leadership, if their cuts had stood. But Democrats, with sup-

port from the White House and Republicans who bolted from the Gingrich-Walker line, were able to add about \$6.5 billion to R&D programs. These additions increased NASA's funding by more than \$1.2 billion over the two years, saved R&D in the TVA budget from being zeroed out, and added nearly \$2.5 billion in health care R&D.

Brown's proposal is to maintain R&D funding at the 2.4% of GNP that it currently represents in the federal budget, while the budget is being balanced, and then to evaluate how much investment is needed. Keeping R&D spending at 2.4% of GNP would mean a 5% per year increase in R&D, he estimated, and would be about \$38 billion more than the President's current budget, and \$49 billion more than the Republican projections.

Cocaine scandal in midst of intelligence debate

The allegations that the Nicaraguan Contras ran crack cocaine into south-central Los Angeles with the knowledge and aid of the CIA during the 1980s, dominated the debate in the House on the Intelligence authorization bill on Sept. 25. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) introduced the subject by asking Larry Combest (R-Tex.), the chairman of the Intelligence Committee, and Norman Dicks (D-Wash.), the ranking member, for their assurance that the charges would be investigated.

Dicks said that the conclusions in the *San Jose Mercury News* series are "done by inference," but, nevertheless, they should be investigated "completely and fully, because we take it as a very serious matter."

Combest said, "We will investigate it with vigor." Combest reported that Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), a former chairman of the Intelligence Commit-

tee and member of the Iran-Contra committee, would be granted permission to review classified documents from the Iran-Contra investigations.

Several Democrats joined the debate in support of Waters, including Maurice Hinchey (N.Y.). Hinchey said that "the reason these stories persist is because prior investigations by this body and other bodies have failed to reach into the very depths of the problem and uncover precisely what went on here. . . . This issue will not die until we get to the very bottom of it." Also associating themselves with Waters's remarks were Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif.) and Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), and one Republican, Jerry Lewis (Calif.).

Bill McCollum (R-Fla.), a so-called "law and order" man, defended the CIA. McCollum said he was "very concerned" about allegations of CIA involvement in drug-running because "I do not personally think there is any truth to it." He claimed to have spent two years investigating charges of CIA involvement in Contra drug-running, but "there was no substantial evidence that this occurred." He demanded that the Congress, rather than "jump" to conclusions, ought to "let the CIA do its investigation."

Hollings again hits free trade lunacy

Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) took to the floor of the Senate on Sept. 27, to hit the propagandists for free trade in the context of the current Presidential campaign. He attacked the "mindless discussion in which each candidate proudly proclaims that he or she is for the family and he or she is against crime." "What neither party wants to admit," he said, "is the immutable con-

nection between two decades of economic stagnation and dislocation, and the breakdown of families and the destruction of communities."

He said that the disappearance of over 2 million manufacturing jobs over the last ten years is ripping apart the social fabric of hundreds of communities. "Isn't it more than a coincidence that the breakdown in the family and the collapse of our inner cities would coincide with an unprecedented era of economic insecurity?" he asked.

Hollings praised the recent series in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* by Donald Bartlett and James Steele, for "putting a human face on the devastation wrought by our failed trade policy." The strength of their argument, he said, "has been epitomized by the vicious attacks that have been leveled at this prize-winning team," attacks which have been produced by "the same mindless, conventional wisdom that equates unilateral free trade with economic growth."

"During the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] debate, the purveyors of conventional wisdom anointed Carlos Salinas as the man of the decade, valiantly reforming the political system and transforming the Mexican economy," Hollings said. Instead of ushering in a golden era of exports to Mexico, the United States has a \$23.3 billion trade deficit, "the Mexican economy collapsed into a depression, and the man of the year, Carlos Salinas, is living in forced exile while the extent of his administration's corruption is documented in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*." Under NAFTA-GATT, "trade has become a net drag on the economy, robbing the United States of close to 1% of growth as imports consistently outpace exports."