

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

House Republicans ram through rules changes

The House took up as its first order of business, amid the turbulence surrounding the reelection of House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), 25 changes to the House rules, which reflect the Conservative Revolution agenda. Among the changes enacted, by a party-line vote of 221-202, were a system for random drug testing of House members and staff, a requirement that public witnesses provide information about federal grants their organizations receive, a Constitutional Authority Statement to accompany committee reports on bills, a reduced time for filing minority views on committee reports, the establishment of a "reserve" fund for unanticipated committee expenses, changes in the budget and appropriations processes, and setting Jan. 21 as the date of expiration of the House Ethics Committee investigation of Gingrich.

The debate was dominated by Gingrich's ethics problems, but Democrats objected to other aspects of the proposed rules changes. Minority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.) said, "We have heard a lot of talk about freedom and democracy here today. Sadly, we moved away from those principles in the last Congress." The proposed rules package, he said, "makes the problem worse, not better. We cannot build a foundation of trust by giving House committees slush funds to conduct sham investigations, by rolling back minority rights, or by completely ignoring the other side."

David Skaggs (D-Colo.) singled out the provision on public witnesses for attack. "We should be concerned with the First Amendment's guarantee of the rights of all Americans to petition their government." Instead, the rules change creates "a new and absurd barrier to public participation in House

hearings by saying that any non-governmental witness testifying in committee will have to file, as a precondition, a full report of all contracts, subcontracts, grants, subgrants, received by that individual, his organization, or anyone he is representing." Skaggs described the rule as "a barrier to discourage and intimidate citizens from around the country in coming to talk to us about the public's business."

Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) said that the rule was needed because "the Heritage Foundation, the National Taxpayers Union, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the taxpayers of my district want to know who is coming here to testify for more handouts."

Conservative Revolution still reigns in Congress

The "Contract on America" may be dead as a campaign strategy, but it lives on as an agenda in the 105th Congress. This was indicated in statements made by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) during the opening week of the new Congress.

On the House side, agenda items include the Balanced Budget Amendment, a term-limits amendment, a capital gains tax cut, and tax reform, including either a flat tax or a national sales tax. Another item is "judicial activism," on which Gingrich reported that Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) has agreed to hold hearings.

In his speech after being reelected Speaker, Gingrich stressed national missile defense and management reform. "We have," he said, "every opportunity to apply the lessons of downsizing, the lessons of the information

age," to turn the Pentagon into a "triangle."

On the Senate side, Lott laid out an overlapping agenda, but the list of bills won't be decided upon until after the Senate Republican Caucus meets for two days just before the Inauguration.

More significant, perhaps, than the Republican agenda, will be the GOP strategy for dealing with President Clinton, especially on the budget. Lott told the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 8 that Clinton "needs to show leadership. We will wait for him to provide us his budget suggestions, suggest agenda items that he thinks are important." Lott promised that if the President doesn't offer an agenda, "we will move forward with our own agenda," sentiments echoed by Gingrich and other Republican leaders.

Dorgan, Ashcroft attack assisted suicide

On Jan. 8, the day that the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in two assisted suicide cases, Sens. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) announced that they would be introducing legislation that would prohibit federal funding of physician-assisted suicide.

Dorgan conceded that the bill would not address whether assisted suicide is a constitutional right, nor the fact that after World War II, the United States hung Nazi doctors for the crime of euthanasia. As to the constitutional issue, Dorgan said, "My own view is that the central question is one that is answered and has been answered, I suppose, by those who are ill, by their families, with their doctors, by the states, and now by the courts."

The bill will prohibit states from paying for physician-assisted suicides

with Medicaid or Medicare funds. Ashcroft said this reflects "the fact that the American people understand that the health care programs in this country were designed to sustain life and to promote health, and that it's simply outside the purview of what was expected when these were created, that they be used to end or destroy life."

Ironically, Dorgan used the same argument against federal funding of assisted suicide that is often used by supporters of assisted suicide, that of "limited resources." "We have a limited amount of health care dollars with which to meet our health care needs in this country, in a wide range of health care areas," he said. "I believe . . . that we don't have sufficient health care money to meet current needs, and no one should really believe that in this context we ought to be deciding to allow circumstances, court decisions, and state laws decide that we will use federal dollars to fund physician-assisted suicides."

Louisiana election goes to the Senate

Mary Landrieu (D-La.) was sworn in and seated "without prejudice," when the Senate opened on Jan. 7, pending the outcome of a Senate Rules Committee investigation of her election, which is being contested by her opponent, Woody Jenkins (R).

Rules Committee Chairman John Warner (R-Va.) reported to the Senate that day that both parties have appointed outside counsel to review the documents submitted by Jenkins, and that Landrieu will respond to Jenkins's filing on Jan. 17. Warner said that he was "hopeful" that the full committee will be able to review the outside counsels' reports by early February. The

Rules Committee will then offer a resolution that will either confirm Landrieu's victory, order that Jenkins be seated in Landrieu's place, or order a new election.

The Senate failed, however, to come to an agreement on debate of whatever resolution comes out of the Rules Committee. Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) noted the potential difficulty of such situations, and had asked for 30 hours of debate to be immediately followed by a vote. Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) objected that "this particular consent request would require that the minority give up the motion to proceed to the debate and the right to debate the resolution fully if we see some need to go beyond the 30 hours, and it does not allow amendments."

Jenkins was considered a shoo-in in the election, until his role in George Bush's Contra cocaine running became an issue late in the campaign.

Senate panel moves fast on Albright nomination

Confirmation hearings for Secretary of State nominee Madeleine Albright began before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Jan. 8 and 9. Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) made clear that he intends to expedite the confirmation of Albright, whom he repeatedly called "Ambassador to Be," with a committee vote expected by Jan. 21. The hearing was not marked by controversy; it is clear that Helms regards her favorably.

Albright sent mixed signals in her statement and answers, leaving unclear what policies will mark her tenure. The predominant concerns addressed by senators were funding issues, UN reform and U.S. arrears to the UN, alleged human rights viola-

tions in Myanmar, Indonesia, and China, drug trafficking, consultation with Congress, the chemical weapons treaty, NATO expansion, Bosnia, and the definition of the leadership role the United States will play in the world. She stressed that for the Clinton administration, foreign economic policy is part of national security. She said that the Treasury, Commerce, and Trade representatives would work with her as a team, and she denounced the cuts in the State Department budget for foreign policy.

Albright described herself as a "pragmatist," who believes the United States should intervene "where we can make a difference," citing the developing crisis in Cyprus as an example. She said the United States has been steadfast in supporting "peacemakers" over "bomb throwers," in historically troubled regions, over the last four years. "We stand ready to play a continuing or increased role in helping to reduce tension in areas where we have an interest, including Cyprus, Central Africa, South Asia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Northern Ireland." She recommended the "UN mechanism," in which the United States cannot or should not act alone.

Albright reiterated support for a "multi-faceted relationship" to China, and a one-China policy, while maintaining "unofficial robust" relations with Taiwan. She said that economic policy should not be tied to human rights concerns.

In response to a question from Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), about cultural determinism in Africa leading to chaos, she said this theory was pessimistic, and so depressing it was "un-American." She said that it is important to understand that Africa is important, and the humanitarian consequences of not paying attention to Africa would be devastating.