

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Thompson moves ahead with probe of DNC

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee voted 8-4 on Jan. 30, to request \$6.5 million to conduct an investigation of Democratic National Committee fundraising practices during the 1996 elections. The vote followed the rejection of a narrower probe proposed by committee Democrats that would cost \$1.8 million and expire at the end of the year.

During remarks on the Senate floor two days earlier, committee chairman Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.) went out of his way to assure members that his investigation would be as nonpartisan as possible. He said, "It is of extreme importance that our investigation and our hearings be perceived by the American people as being fair and evenhanded." This means, he said, "letting the chips fall where they may." Thompson promised that the majority on the panel "will in no way limit the minority's rights to investigate any and all parties within the jurisdiction of the committee."

However, he admitted that a "significant portion" of his investigation will focus on the White House and the Executive branch, and he clearly put the onus on the Clinton administration to be cooperative. "The extent to which we can have a thorough, bipartisan investigation without many of the recriminations we have seen in the past is going to depend upon the attitude of those in the White House and the Executive branch."

Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), also a member of the Governmental Affairs Committee, said that the way to deal with campaign finance irregularities is to give the Federal Election Commission "some teeth, and let them investigate." In a statement on the Senate

floor after the committee vote, he said, "The trail of trouble isn't just in the national committees . . . and there are problems in both national committees." In a not-so-veiled reference to the problems of House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Dorgan said, "Let's investigate the growth of these 501(c)(3) [tax-exempt] organizations that some in politics have created to get tax-exempt money and use it in the political system. Let's follow that string wherever it leads." Dorgan added that there are plenty of questions of concern in that area that merit being addressed by investigators.

### McCain offers permanent continuing resolution

On Jan. 29, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) introduced a bill to put in place a statutory continuing resolution, a "safety net," that would only be triggered when the Congress fails to pass appropriations bills. The legislation, McCain said, "ensures that the government will not shut down and that government shutdowns cannot be used for political gain."

What McCain was referring to by "political gain," was the backlash House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and the Conservative Revolution crowd suffered because of their kamikazi tactic of shutting down the Federal government in 1995, in an attempt to force President Clinton to accept their budget cuts.

McCain's bill sets the spending level as low as possible, in order to create "new incentive to actually pass the appropriations bills on time."

"Passage of this legislation," he said, "will guarantee that we are not

faced with a choice between a government shutdown and spending taxpayer dollars irresponsibly."

McCain described the budget process of the 104th Congress as a "fiasco," and tried to shift the blame for it as much as possible onto President Clinton and Congressional Democrats. "We were not prepared for him to use the budget process for his own political gains," he complained. He described the concessions made by the Republicans to reopen the government and finish the fiscal year 1997 appropriations process as "blackmail" by Clinton. "This year," he said, "we have to be prepared for these games and launch a preemptive strike to ensure that basic government operations will not be put at risk during the next budget battle."

### Dorgan seeks to reopen last year's farm bill

In a speech on the floor of the Senate on Jan. 29, Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) said that "the seven-year farm bill that was passed in the last session of Congress is an economic disaster in the making for rural America. All that needs to happen is for mother nature to bless us with abundant crops and farm prices will once again fall." He added that under the new law, "there is no safety net for our nation's farm and ranch families, who provide the economic base of rural America."

While Dorgan did not come right out and state that there is no free market in the agricultural sector, which was the premise of the 1996 farm bill, called the "Freedom to Farm Act," he attacked aspects of cartel control.

Dorgan attacked market concen-

tration in the cattle industry, pointing out that only four companies control 80% of steer and heifer slaughter. "This is an enormous economic bottleneck," he said. He called this concentration "a serious underlying disease in our livestock industry."

The solution which Dorgan supports for this problem, is embodied in a bill introduced by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) on Jan. 21. It would prohibit noncompetitive practices and require slaughterhouses to report every transaction they make with meat producers, including the prices they pay, "so that everybody in the livestock business knows what is being paid and the terms of the sales." A second bill, also supported by Dorgan, would provide a safety net for wheat producers by increasing commodity loan rates.

## **GOP crime bill includes slave labor provisions**

The "Omnibus Crime Control Act of 1997," introduced in the Senate as part of the Republican legislative agenda on Jan. 21, includes a prison slave labor provision, and exclusionary rule reform which was passed by the House two years ago but not taken up by the Senate. Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said that this bill, along with another, the "Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act of 1997," are follow-ons to the crime bills passed in the 104th Congress, including *habeas corpus* reform, truth-in-sentencing, prison litigation, victim restitution, and the anti-terrorism bill.

The exclusionary rule reform is nearly identical in language to that passed by the House in the 104th Congress. It provides that "evidence ob-

tained as a result of a search or seizure shall not be excluded on the ground that the search or seizure was in violation of the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution." Attempts by Democrats to add the language of the Fourth Amendment to the bill two years ago were defeated.

The prison labor provision requires that all inmates in the Federal prison system subject to security and health considerations, will be required to work without compensation and without any consideration for the impact that such work may have on local economic conditions.

The bill also contains a provision responding to what Hatch described as "the nation's new problem with drug legalization," the referenda in California and Arizona that legalize, under state law, the prescribing of marijuana for medicinal purposes. The bill requires that all hospitals and health care providers who receive Federal Medicare or Medicaid payments, be certified that no physicians in their systems are or will prescribe any Schedule I controlled substance. It also provides that the Drug Enforcement Administration registration of any medical professional who does prescribe a Schedule I controlled substance, be revoked.

## **Richardson grilled by Senate panel on Sudan**

On Jan. 29, Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) grilled Rep. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.) on Clinton administration policy toward Sudan, during Richardson's confirmation hearing to become U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Ashcroft took out the previous week's *Washington Post* article which

claimed that there was an exemption made to last year's anti-terrorism legislation to allow Occidental Petroleum to do business in Sudan, and asked Richardson, "Do you see any contradiction between the administration's interpretation of the law and the actual language of the statute or your understanding of the statute when you voted for it" in the 104th Congress? Richardson replied, "The administration's view is that this was done properly." He assured Ashcroft that the sanctions against Sudan were still in place.

Ashcroft then suggested that Richardson's mission to Sudan late last year to negotiate the release of three Red Cross workers held hostage by a rebel group, was further evidence that the Clinton administration was making deals with terrorists. Richardson explained that he was not in Sudan as a representative of the State Department, that he did all the negotiating, and that he was asked to go by the Red Cross, by the governments of Australia, Switzerland (where two of the hostages were from), by Kenya, and by the wife of the third hostage, who was from his district in New Mexico. All he did, Richardson told Ashcroft, was persuade the rebel leader, who, he pointed out, was not part of the government, to accept an offer of medical and humanitarian supplies, already made to him by the Red Cross.

Otherwise, Richardson received a very warm welcome from the committee, and was given two ringing endorsements from the witness table by two Republican senators, Pete Domenici (N.M.) and Orrin Hatch (Utah), though Republican members of the committee took the opportunity to criticize Clinton administration policy, especially with regard to U.S. funding of the United Nations.