

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

GOP leadership fissures grow deeper

On July 16, news of a coup attempt against House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) organized by the top Republican Party leadership exploded onto Capitol Hill on the front page of *The Hill* newspaper. In the aftermath of that news report and others that immediately followed, Bill Paxon (R-N.Y.) was fired, or resigned, from his post as chairman of the leadership grouping, a post he was appointed to by Gingrich after the 1996 election.

The news reports identified the leaders of the coup as Majority Leader Dick Armev (R-Tex.) and Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-Tex.), working in concert with a group of renegade GOPers led by Lindsay Graham (S.C.). The scheme they apparently finally agreed upon, after a now-infamous July 10 meeting, was for Armev to take over the Speaker's chair, and Paxon to become majority leader. Other accounts had Paxon as the one who would become Speaker. The coup allegedly fell apart when Armev realized that he wouldn't have the votes to become Speaker, which gave Gingrich the chance to move against the plot.

In the days that followed, Armev and Paxon both denied having any role in the affair, and Delay has refused to comment on it. Delay was fingered by Matt Salmon (R-Ariz.), on the ABC News program "This Week with David Brinkley" on July 20, as the leader who participated in the July 10 meeting, while Armev did not. But, Salmon said, "I think initially when Tom came to the meeting, he was trying to assess exactly how serious this was, which was kind of a Catch-22 because it wouldn't have been that serious . . . had Tom Delay not come to the meeting."

Most Republicans who are speaking out on the affair, including Peter King (N.Y.) and Joe Scarborough

(Fla.), are calling for holding back on a no-confidence vote on Gingrich and the rest of the leadership until after the budget reconciliation and appropriations process are completed, in three or four months.

Foreign Aid bill passed by Senate

On July 17, the Senate passed the 1998 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, with one amendment on religious freedom in Russia, and another restoring foreign aid to Egypt.

Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) sponsored an amendment that would, in his words, "withhold funds appropriated . . . to Russia unless the President determines and verifies in writing to the Congress that the government of Russia has enacted no statute that would discriminate against religious minorities in the Russian Federation." Smith's amendment was passed by a vote of 95-4.

Only Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) spoke against it, and that after the vote. He said, "If the same standard included in the Smith amendment was applied to all other nations, we would be forced to terminate our foreign aid to other key United States allies, including Israel, Egypt, and Turkey. . . . This amendment, therefore, discriminates against one nation, even while it claims that discrimination is its concern." He strongly criticized the religious laws of Israel, which give Israeli Arabs a second-class status. Byrd said, "I wanted to call to the attention of the Senate the problem here of rushing to vote on matters that we don't clearly understand."

The foreign aid to Egypt was restored by an amendment sponsored by Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), chairman of the Foreign Operations subcommit-

tee, which voted to cut off the aid a couple of weeks ago. However, McConnell had nothing but criticism for the government of Egypt, complaining about President Hosni Mubarak's supposed lack of interest in the Middle East peace process and Egypt's relationship with Libya, without mentioning a word about Israeli provocations. He described American foreign assistance as being "geared to behavior," and said, "It is my hope that the Egyptians are back on track and willing to resume being a constructive partner in the Middle East peace process."

Negotiations continue on budget and tax bills

A rift has opened between the White House and Congressional Republicans, over how fair the tax plan now under negotiation is, and whether working people who make too little money to pay income taxes deserve tax relief. President Clinton, after meeting with Congressional leaders on July 15, said, "I think we ought to give a tax cut to the people making \$22,000, \$24,000, \$25,000 a year who have children." Under the current Republican plan, people in that income range would be ineligible for the \$500 per child tax credit. Republicans are continuing to call such a tax credit for those income ranges, "welfare."

Other points of contention include the actual amount of the tax cuts. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) said on the ABC News program "This Week with David Brinkley" on July 20, that while the Republicans agreed to \$85 billion in tax cuts (they actually want much more) in the budget agreement, Clinton's plan only contains \$58 billion. He said this was "the biggest hang-up" in the negotiations at the moment.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) expressed confidence, however, after the meeting with Clinton, that both the budget and the tax cut bills would be ready for Clinton's signature by Aug. 1, before the Congress recesses for the summer.

Smith, Payne used by Brits on Congo/Zaire

On July 16, the House International Relations Committee held a hearing to assess "The Democratic Republic Of Congo: Problems and Prospects." State Department representatives were grilled about U.S. policy toward Congo/Zaire, including by Don Payne (D-N.J.) and Chris Smith (R-N.J.).

Payne, former chairman of the Black Caucus and self-appointed "Africa expert," took the position that the administration had no right to pass judgment on Congo dictator Laurent Kabila or the massacres, because of the complicity of the U.S. government in propping up former President Mobutu Sese Seko, and because of the lack of action during the genocide in 1994. Payne argued that holding Kabila to democratic standards, such as elections by 1999, would be hypocritical. While claiming that he supports a UN investigation of the genocide, he blamed the Hutu militias for causing the "ethnic conflict" in Rwanda, going back to 1994, when "people had to come out of Uganda to save people from being exterminated." He suggested that it would be discovered that any current excesses were due to Kabila's forces curbing the activities of the Hutu militias that were allegedly operating out of the refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

Smith, who had called for hearings demanding action to protect the refugees last November, zeroed in on

the recent *Washington Post* articles on the role of Rwandan Defense Minister Paul Kagame in the invasion of Congo. However, instead of attacking the British for directing the operation, Smith is furthering the British game-plan—to dump the blame for the genocide on the Clinton administration, the one Western government which has tried to stop Kabila's massacres.

Funds for UN World Heritage rejected

The House voted 222-203 on July 15, during debate on the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, to prohibit funding for the UN Man and the Biosphere program and the World Heritage program. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), who sponsored the amendment, said that "in the last several years millions of dollars have been spent on this program as well as hundreds of other programs without any authorization whatsoever from this body." He said that those who vote against his amendment oppose "us operating under the rules that we have set for ourselves, because what we have said is that we are not going to fund money for any programs that are not authorized."

Helen Chenoweth (R-Id.) said that 47 biosphere reserve sites "have already been designated in the United States without Congressional authority."

Democrats challenged Republican assertions that there have been no oversight and authorization for these programs. But, more to the point, they defended the UN and these programs. Esteban Torres (D-Calif.) argued that these programs "are simply voluntary vehicles for designated areas around the world as international treasures

that must be preserved, and to protect the people of the world from the problems of pollution that, as we all are aware, knows no national boundaries."

Hispanic Caucus turns against NAFTA, sort of

On July 16, the leadership of the House Hispanic Caucus joined a number of Hispanic lobbying organizations to condemn the report on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), released by the Clinton administration the previous week. Hispanic Caucus Chairman Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.) was joined at a press conference by Esteban Torres (D-Calif.) and freshmen Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.) and Ciro Rodriguez (D-Tex.), where they released a letter to President Clinton warning that they could not support fast-track negotiating authority for expanding NAFTA to Chile and other countries, without being certain "that the economic, safety, and health interests of our constituents are not compromised by future trade agreements."

Most of the Hispanic Caucus voted for NAFTA in 1993, but those who remain in Congress are having reservations, because the programs that were set up in the Department of Labor to help workers displaced by free trade, aren't working. Becerra termed NAFTA a series of "broken promises."

However, none are having second thoughts about free trade itself, even though that policy is responsible for their concerns about employment, health, and safety. As Torres said, "We have to fix the programs that are not working." Rodriguez added, "There is a need for us to look at infrastructure, human development, and the environment as we move on with globalism."