

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

House GOP makes leadership changes

The House Republican caucus elected some new leaders for the 106th Congress, during three days of meetings that began on Nov. 18. As expected, Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) was anointed as the next Speaker after all challengers, including Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.), withdrew. Dick Armey (R-Tex.) survived strong challenges from Steve Largent (R-Okla.) and Jennifer Dunn (R-Wash.), and will remain Majority Leader, although it took three ballots before a final result was announced.

Among those who did not survive challenges were Conference Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio), who was defeated by J.C. Watts (R-Okla.); and John Linder (R-Ga.), who was replaced by Tom Davis (R-Va.) as head of the National Republican Campaign Committee (NRCC).

The one incumbent who came out the strongest was Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). He aided Davis's takeover of the NRCC, supplying him one of his top staffers to assist his campaign. In return, DeLay received assurances that he would be allowed more input into leadership decisions, including a bigger budget and staff, and greater clout inside the NRCC, which raises funds and recruits candidates for Congressional elections. DeLay is also expected to receive more authority over the "K Street Strategy," the GOP's operation to purge Democrats from the heads of lobbying firms and trade associations.

The leadership changes and retirements also have resulted in committee changes. C.W. "Bill" Young (R-Fla.) will replace Livingston as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Larry Combest (R-Tex.) will take over for

the retiring Bob Smith (R-Ore.) as head of the Agriculture panel, and David Dreier (R-Calif.) will replace Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.), who is retiring, as chairman of the Rules Committee.

Democrats plan few changes in House

House Democrats had their organizational meetings on Nov. 16 and 17, and, as expected, made few changes. Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Minority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.) were unchallenged, and Martin Frost (D-Tex.) was elected Democratic Caucus chairman over Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) to replace Vic Fazio (D-Calif.), who is retiring.

Frost has received much of the credit for the Democrats gaining 12 seats in the last two elections because of his work as head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee during the last four years. The only other contested race was for caucus vice-chair, in which Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) defeated Calvin Dooley (D-Calif.). That position was previously held by Barbara Kennelly (D-Conn.), who retired to run for governor of Connecticut.

While Gephardt and other Democratic leaders have pledged to reach out to Republicans to get their agenda passed, they are already headed for their first confrontation with the GOP leadership on committee ratios, which have not changed since 1995. On Nov. 20, Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) threatened that the Democrats would "shut down the House" if they did not get ratios that reflect the gains Democrats have made in the last two elections. Gephardt told *Roll Call* that Speaker-elect Bob Livingston (R-La.) would not budge from his offer of seven seats across all committees, because of re-

sistance from his party's committee chairmen. Democrats say an additional 43 seats across all committees would more closely approximate the 51-49 ratio of seats in the House chamber.

Competing agendas set stage for 106th Congress

Conciliation was the order of the day when the House caucuses of both parties spoke about their legislative agendas during their organizational meetings. But, the agendas which leaders of both parties discussed with reporters are very much along the lines of the 105th Congress: Republicans intend to continue to pursue tax and budget cuts, welfare reform, and free trade. Democrats have already promised that the first bill they will introduce is the Patients' Health Care Bill of Rights. They also intend to continue to push for campaign finance reform and anti-teen-smoking legislation.

The first bill Republicans intend to introduce will be one that takes the Social Security trust fund off-budget. Speaker-elect Bob Livingston (R-La.) was at pains to explain to NBC's Tim Russert on Nov. 22, why this would not increase the budget deficit. Republicans can go ahead with tax cuts, Livingston said—even though taking Social Security off-budget would mean that the current \$70 million budget surplus would be turned into a \$29 billion deficit—because the Congressional Budget Office has "consistently over the last five to ten years been too conservative when estimating the amount of surpluses." As for tax cuts, Livingston said that he would like to do them "incrementally," suggesting that it would be easier to get President Clinton to sign a number of smaller tax cuts as opposed to one big one.

On Nov. 21, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) indicated that the GOP leadership has a "strong commitment" to pass a budget resolution and a budget reconciliation bill in 1999, which they failed to do in 1998. Archer said his desire was to "move as far as we can on a bipartisan basis" in order to get things done.

Democrats are welcoming this new cooperative attitude from the GOP leadership, but Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) warned that if they try to pass legislation with only Republican votes, they will finish the 106th Congress "without anything to show for two years effort — no legislation passed, no budget gets passed."

Hagel challenges McConnell for NRSC post

Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) announced on Nov. 24 that he will be challenging Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) for head of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the campaign fundraising committee for Senate Republicans. So far, Hagel's challenge is the only open sign among Senate Republicans of any dissatisfaction with the current leadership in the aftermath of the November elections. Leadership elections for both Senate Democrats and Republicans are set for Dec. 1.

Hagel kept his remarks positive and refrained from attacks on McConnell or any other member of the leadership. He did make it clear, however, that were he selected to run the NRSC, "You would find a rather remarkable change in the culture and the philosophy about this committee." Hagel said that he would not allow NRSC funds to be used for negative campaign ads.

"I personally am offended," he said, "by all the nonsense that we've seen this year and all the previous years on how we demonize each other." He said the reason why he decided to seek the post was because "I think I could do this in a very good way, a very meaningful way that could make a difference."

McConnell is famous for his uncompromising opposition to any sort of campaign reform, and Hagel said that, while he opposed the specific form of the McCain-Feingold legislation from earlier this year, "I think you've got to have a lot more accountability for soft money than you do now." He indicated that soft money is useful for things like "building turnout, building infrastructure," but his priority would be on raising hard money, which can be used directly by candidates.

GOP asks Social Security plan from White House

On Nov. 20, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) demanded that President Clinton submit to Congress "a specific plan to save Social Security." He warned that without a such as plan from Clinton, "this very difficult job will become much, much harder and some even say it could be impossible."

Archer's remarks came the day after a contentious hearing of his committee, in which Treasury Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy David Wilcox spent two hours defending the administration against charges that the White house is moving too slowly on developing a plan to reform Social Security. Wilcox argued that it is still too early to decide how to change the program or how to proceed.

Barr ally says troops would disobey President

Bob Barr (R-Ga.), a member of the House Judiciary Committee and a former Federal prosecutor and CIA official, on Nov. 17 held a press briefing in Washington, D.C. to demand that President Bill Clinton be impeached. At the briefing, speakers built a climate for insubordination against the Commander-in-Chief by members of the Armed Forces.

Army nuclear weapons specialist Gen. Albion Knight (ret.) played up the "discontent among the troops" against the President, as a reason to proceed with his impeachment. "There comes a point in which our Armed services find it impossible to serve a Commander-in-Chief of the nature of the one that we have," Knight said, according to Federal News Service reports. "We are concerned, as members of the Armed Forces, that a foreign power [China], which we do consider an enemy, has bought the government of the United States." Knight is an activist in the British-Israelite circles of Gen. Ralph Haines. In close coordination with the British Crown and the Church of England, General Knight told *EIR* last year that he manages the Church Information Center, which, he says, "feeds information to . . . an intelligence network in the Anglican world."

Other speakers at the Barr rally included Howard Phillips, co-leader with General Knight of the Taxpayers Party and the Conservative Caucus; and Morton Blackwell, executive director of the secretive Council for National Policy (an umbrella for the pro-British faction of the self-styled right-wing underground, including newsletters, etc.), the hard-core Christian Right, the Heritage Foundation, and mercenary leaders.