

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Attacks in New York, D.C. Disrupt Hill Routine

The covert, strategic operation, with simultaneous attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, brought to a sudden end the partisan bickering that has characterized the 107th Congress almost since it convened. Within a couple of hours, the entire Capitol complex had been evacuated and shut down, and House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) were reportedly taken to “secure locations.” The shutdown resulted in chaos and confusion for some hours afterwards, as the streets around the Capitol and the House and Senate office buildings were closed to both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and members of Congress milled about outside the cordoned-off area, some giving street-corner interviews to news media, or gathered in nearby restaurants.

The first order of business when Congress reconvened on Sept. 12 was a strongly worded joint resolution to condemn the two attacks, which passed both the House and the Senate by unanimous votes. Among other things, the resolution declared that “these premeditated attacks struck not only at the people of America, but also the symbols and structures of our economic and military strength and . . . the United States is entitled to respond under international law.” The resolution also declared support for the “determination of the President, in close consultation with the Congress, to bring to justice and punish the perpetrators of these attacks as well as their sponsors.” The House debate lasted until about 1 a.m. on Sept. 13, to give as many members as possible a chance to make floor speeches on the resolution.

Another concern of lawmakers is

the apparent failure of intelligence services to detect the attacks beforehand. With the exception of certain loose cannons, such as Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), most members were reluctant to accuse the intelligence community of an “intelligence failure.” Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Bob Graham (D-Fla.) complained, “There was not a single agency, much less a single individual,” who could be held accountable. He called that a “serious restraint” on the ability of the intelligence community to deal with those sorts of threats.

### House Moves Quickly On Supplemental Spending Bill

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.) promised to move a new \$20 billion supplemental spending bill as quickly as possible, to fulfill a request from President George Bush for money for disaster recovery in New York and at the Pentagon, for additional security measures at airports and elsewhere in the United States, and for the investigation to identify the perpetrators of the two attacks. The normal partisan warfare that has dominated budget debates in recent years has mostly been absent since the attacks. The White House initially had asked for an open-ended bill, but Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.) balked, arguing that that would amount to a “blank check.” “Anyone who votes to give that away,” he said, “ought to be impeached.”

The events of Sept. 11 are likely to result in a total recasting of all of the appropriations bills. In light of the impact of the attacks, budget priorities have been completely rearranged. “This changes everything,” Senate

Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) said. “The top priority is to defend this country.”

### Democrats Must Provide Leadership

Prior to the events of Sept. 11, the reality of the collapse of the U.S. economy had begun to poke its ugly head into the political processes on Capitol Hill. On Sept. 9, the *Washington Post* reported that House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) told President Bush that, in terms of the economy, “a year from now is when it matters to us.” Bush, who had only recently begun to notice problems in the economy, was reported to have replied, “It’s my time frame, too.” A year from now, of course, is the mid-term elections for the House and for one-third of the Senate.

Democrats responded to the situation by publicly announcing that they would do nothing. Typical of this was Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), who, when asked how the Social Security trust fund was going to be kept whole, replied, “That’s what we’re asking the Administration. It’s their budget. Their tax cut. And I think it ought to be their solutions.” His excuse was that the Democrats don’t control the White House, or the House of Representatives and have only a one-vote majority in the Senate, so therefore they don’t have the strength to do anything.

Democratic Presidential pre-candidate for 2004 Lyndon LaRouche responded to this problem during a Sept. 11 appearance on the Jack Stockwell radio show as the attacks in New York and at the Pentagon were unfolding. He said that he “could be in a position very easily to steer these guys into do-

ing things that would begin to work, even with the limited strength the Democratic Party has, today.” He added that “if the party would do some of those things . . . we would not only be able to shake the population a bit into believing there’s somebody up there that might help them, you’d also find a number of Republicans who are not nuts, and who are simply patriotic, and will listen to reason, who would cooperate with the Democrats in doing some of the things we have to do.” Instead, “We have a vacuum of leadership.”

## Missile Defense Splits Senate Panel

On Sept. 7, the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 13-12 on strict partisan lines to report out the fiscal year 2002 Defense Authorization bill. The bill includes increases in most of the major line items in the budget, including \$700 million for military pay and other benefits for service members, more than \$1 billion to improve military readiness, \$800 million for transformation efforts, and \$600 million to give the services the capability to meet “nontraditional threats,” such as terrorism. It also includes provision for an additional round of base closures, which committee chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said, is expected to save about \$6 billion a year. The Bush Administration’s \$18.4 billion supplemental request is included in the bill, but Levin made clear that the budget politics of the Congress will determine whether that \$18.4 billion is actually appropriated.

Where the Democrats and the GOP split, was on missile defense. The committee voted, again on party lines, to reduce the Administration’s budget request from \$8.3 billion to \$7

billion, and to make funding for any national missile defense tests contingent on the White House informing Congress whether a planned test will be in conflict with the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Levin complained that he has been asking Pentagon officials for months whether they plan any such tests, and has yet to get a straight answer. He said that “it is important for Congress to know,” because it has a “significant impact” on how Senators are likely to vote on missile defense.

John Warner (R-Va.) complained that the Levin language could mean that even if the United States withdraws from the ABM Treaty, which the treaty allows for, the Senate could still vote to deny the use of funds for testing. He also complained that the reduction in the funding request cuts across all missile defense programs, not just national missile defense. Warner vowed that the Levin language “will not see its way into legislation.”

The House, in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, was trying to figure out the fastest way to bring its bill to the floor in such a way that new provisions to deal with the attacks would not be precluded. Parts of the bill are likely to be rewritten to reflect the new priorities and to avoid contentious issues.

## Skelton Gives Democrats’ Response To Bush Strategy

On Sept. 4, Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), the ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee, articulated the Democratic view of military strategy and force structure, in a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

Skelton said that the United States must have a strategy before deciding

on a force structure to carry it out. The strategy he called for includes a homeland security strategy, of which missile defense is only a part, not some “Maginot line in the sky.” Missile defense, he said, has become “theological” in some circles. It also includes non-proliferation programs and greater support for intelligence and coordinated response mechanisms. The second element includes active U.S. military engagement abroad, which requires presence overseas as well as military-to-military exchanges. He called “engagement and collaboration with other countries” the “lynchpin” of U.S. national security.

If these preventive actions fail, then the United States must “be able to win decisively, at low risk, a major regional conflict,” he said. At the same time, we must still be able to handle a wide range of other contingencies. To this end, he called for increasing the Army by 20,000 soldiers (as opposed to cutting by as many as 60,000, as has been rumored that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld wants to do); up to 500,000, he said, is the minimum force required to carry out his strategy. He also called for building up the Navy to 360 ships, as a minimum, whereas at current shipbuilding rates, it’ll drop to 230 ships. He didn’t call for increases in force structure for the Air Force, but did call for improvements in long-range bombing and airlift capabilities.

The events of Sept. 11, of course, have radically changed the defense debate in Congress, in some of the ways Skelton was calling for. The debate over missile defense has practically disappeared, and many members of Congress are now calling for the creation of a homeland defense department. During an appearance on CBS’s “Early Show” on Sept. 12, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) said, “We never had to do that before, because we felt we were protected by the oceans.”