

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Wrangling Continues On Iraq War Resolution

A compromise resolution on Iraq proposed by Sens. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) was rejected by President George Bush in late September. The Biden-Lugar proposal would have narrowed the focus of Bush's proposed resolution to Iraq only—to its alleged weapons of mass destruction—and emphasized the importance of working through the UN Security Council. "Our goal from the outset," said Biden in a Sept. 30 statement, "has been to construct a resolution that helps the President attract strong bipartisan support in Congress." Bush rejected the proposal, saying, "I don't want to get a resolution that ties my hands."

The following day, Bush reached agreement with House leaders on the text of a resolution. House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.) claimed that it was "quite a different resolution from where we started," but media reports suggested that the only real difference is the reporting requirements in the new resolution. The new resolution, which the House International Relations Committee was to begin marking up on Oct. 2, requires the President to certify to Congress that only military means are adequate to protect American interests. It also requires a report every 60 days on "matters relevant" to the confrontation with Iraq.

House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) indicated to reporters that he would work to pass the resolution out of his committee with no changes so that "we can all speak with one voice"—repeating Bush's words exactly.

While the Senate has not agreed on the language of a resolution, Biden, the chairman of the Foreign Relations

Committee, cancelled a scheduled committee markup on the language that he and Lugar had proposed. At the same time, he criticized Gephardt for jumping on the war on Iraq bandwagon so quickly. "Democrats are obviously in disagreement," he said. He added that he and Lugar hoped to introduce their measure as an amendment to the Senate resolution but he did not hold out much hope for passage.

The small but vocal opposition to war with Iraq in the House Democratic caucus has been dampened by Gephardt—and by pro-war statements by Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). Participation in the agreement with the White House all but assures passage in the House. Ellen Tauscher (D-Calif.), one of a group of House Democrats who are trying to delay a vote until after next month's elections, said as much when she told reporters, "Unfortunately, this has moved way beyond our ability to put brakes on it."

Bush Is Politicizing War With Iraq, Says Daschle

Majority Leader Tom Daschle's (D-S.D.) frustration with the White House exploded into the open on Sept. 25, when he charged on the Senate floor that President Bush is "politicizing" the issue of war with Iraq. After listing a series of examples of how the Republicans are using the war drive for political advantage, Daschle reported that the *Washington Post* had quoted Bush as saying that the Democrat-controlled Senate is "not interested in the security of the American people." "That is outrageous," Daschle said. "That is wrong. We ought not politicize this war. We ought not politicize the rhetoric about war and life and death."

Daschle was seconded by Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.V.). "I am disgusted by the tenor of the war debate that has seemingly overtaken this capital city," he said. "The President is campaigning using war talk to win the election." He added that the war strategy "seems to have been hatched by political strategists intent on winning the mid-term election at any cost." After further attacks on the political opportunism of the GOP, Byrd said, "I will not give the benefit of the doubt to the President. I will give the benefit of the doubt to the Constitution."

Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.), in turn, attacked the notion that the issue is being politicized. "I think what maybe has happened here is a desire to try to find some way to put the issue off or to, in fact, make it political," he said. He called Daschle's accusation "the worst kind of division. . . . We are not going to question anyone's patriotism here, but we are going to question the commitment and what we need to do to protect the American people."

Anger Over Stalled Budget Flares in House

Yet another measure of the gridlock gripping Capitol Hill was on display on Sept. 26, when the House passed a continuing resolution to fund the government into the beginning of fiscal year 2003, which began on Oct. 1. While there was never any doubt that the resolution would pass—which it did, by a vote of 370 to 1—the debate was dominated by charges and countercharges as to who was at fault for the failure of the appropriations process. Even though the House has passed only five of the 13 appropriations bills, the GOP leadership blames the Senate

for not passing a budget resolution. However, even Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.), in a backhanded sort of way, acknowledged that it is the Republican leadership that has prevented the remainder of the bills from coming to the floor.

David Obey (D-Wisc.), the ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, was far less circumspect. He said that passage of the continuing resolution "will represent an overwhelming indictment of the failures of this Republican House of Representatives" because the "Republican leaders have stopped even trying to do their work."

The bill causing the most heartburn among Democrats is one funding the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Numerous Democrats attacked the GOP for refusing to fund education anywhere near the promise made in last year's much touted "No Child Left Behind" education bill. Obey blamed Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). DeLay, he said, "has decided he does not even have the votes in his own caucus to squeeze down education as much as the President wants." Obey challenged DeLay to let the House work its will on the floor.

A few hours after the House acted, the Senate approved the continuing resolution by unanimous consent, which funded the government only through Oct. 4.

Homeland Security Bill Remains Stalled

Prospects for passage of the bill to create the Department of Homeland Security, originally advanced by Sen. Joe Lieberman (D.-Conn.) dimmed on Oct. 1, after a fifth attempt to limit debate in the Senate failed. After the

vote, Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.), the ranking member on the Governmental Affairs Committee, told reporters that "unless something happens in the very near future, there will not be a homeland security bill this year." Not surprisingly, each side blamed the other for the impasse.

Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who along with Zell Miller (D-Ga.) is sponsoring a substitute amendment acceptable to President Bush, said on Oct. 1, "Our problem really comes down to the political power of the public employee unions." He claimed that the Democrats "are so tied to these public employee labor unions that they're not willing to cross them on issues that have to do with the life and safety of the American people." Miller added, "I think that my Democratic colleagues are making a horrible mistake."

Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) vowed that the bill will remain on the Senate's agenda until it is done. He blamed Republicans for dragging out the debate, saying that if they really wanted the bill, they would vote for cloture. Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Lieberman added, "The Senate has not acted on homeland security because of Republican intransigence, a refusal to compromise in the slightest bit."

Democrats Blast Bush on Unemployment

Not everyone has forgotten all other issues in the clamor for war against Iraq. Democrats have been making half-hearted attempts to remind the Bush Administration that the state of the economy does, indeed, matter. They have been helped by the recent release of a Census Bureau report showing that among all income brack-

ets except the highest, incomes are falling. On Sept. 24, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) warned, "There can be no question that unless we are able to deal more effectively with the economy, it could become a bigger issue than anything else on the horizon." He called on President Bush to "spend as much time each week working on the economy as he does going out to campaign for members of his party."

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.), accompanying Daschle, provided a few of the details of the Census Bureau report. He said that median income dropped last year by 2%, that for the first time in seven years the number of people living in poverty is growing, and that the number of long-term unemployed has doubled. The only solution that Sarbanes proposed, however, is an extension of unemployment benefits. In "the last recession," he said, "we extended unemployment benefits five times, in order to help sustain people through an economic downturn. The jobs are not there for them to be re-employed."

On Sept. 26, Senate Democrats, joined by Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), introduced "The Emergency Unemployment Compensation Act." The bill extends current unemployment benefits for an additional 13 weeks, and for 20 weeks in areas of high unemployment. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), lead sponsor of the bill, told the Senate that the current Bush Administration has been the first to preside over a decline in private sector jobs. Wellstone added that of the 8 million unemployed, one in five has been unemployed longer than six months. Meanwhile, 2 million workers will exhaust their benefits by the end of 2002. "The need is urgent," he said. "We should pass this measure immediately."