

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Obey Calls on Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz To Resign

Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), the ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, sent a letter to President Bush on Sept. 5, suggesting that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, two of the leading chicken-hawks in the Administration, be "allowed" to "return to the private sector."

Obey said that miscalculations by Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld have cost American lives in Iraq and damaged the nation's fiscal health. He also said that the Pentagon should be relieved of its role in determining foreign policy. "It is impossible to review the record of the past year and not conclude that they have made repeated and serious miscalculations," he wrote.

The Wisconsin Democrat's criticism of the war policy continued on Sept. 6. In an interview with the *Capitol Times* of Madison, Wisconsin, Obey called Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz "raving romantics." He said that, before the March invasion, "they had wildly romantic ideas about how easy it was going to be to turn Iraq into a second coming of New Hampshire in terms of democracy."

Obey said that he had thought long and hard before suggesting to President Bush that two members of his administration should leave. "But the more I looked at what is happening in Iraq, at what is happening with our allies, and at what is happening here in the United States, the more I came to the conclusion that this was necessary."

In a Sept. 8 interview with CNN's Soledad O'Brien, Obey was even more explicit as to the source of Rumsfeld's and Wolfowitz's miscalculations. After rejecting the intelligence they were getting from the CIA and the Defense Department, Obey

said Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz "set up their own intelligence operation to get more comfortable intelligence estimates." He further noted that they pushed the State Department's post-invasion planning efforts aside, "and the result is what you see in Iraq every day."

Bush's \$87 Billion Iraq Request Faces Scrutiny

President Bush's Sept. 7 announcement that he will be seeking \$87 billion in supplemental funding for U.S. operations in Iraq is meeting with a mixed reaction on Capitol Hill. Most of the Republican leadership, and at least a few Democrats, are promising to move the money as fast as possible "to help the troops." Most Democrats and a handful of Republicans, on the other hand, are warning that the White House and the Pentagon will have to answer a lot of questions before the money is released.

A statement by House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.) was indicative of the GOP response. "It is my intention," he said, "to aggressively expedite the President's request. . . . We have troops in harms way and we should provide them every resource available to ensure their safety." Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), at a Sept. 9 hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, claimed that the \$87 billion is accounted for in the Fiscal 2004 budget plan and would not add to the deficit.

Anti-war Democrats see the request as an admission of failure by the Bush Administration. Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), the ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, warned that the \$87 billion would only be a downpayment on a policy

which is going to cost a lot more. Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), also on the Appropriations panel, said the request "confirms that the Administration went to war unprepared to secure the peace." However, she said she backed the request "because we must bring peace and democracy to the Iraqi people and send a strong message to terrorist groups like al-Qaeda that we will not back down."

While none have spoken out publicly against Bush's policy, a few Republicans are reported to be concerned about having to explain, back home, why the United States should spend so much money in Iraq while their constituents are losing their jobs.

Wolfowitz, Myers Grilled On Bush's Iraq policy

The extension of tours of reservists in Iraq became a major agenda item for a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing looking into the Bush Administration's Iraq policy on Sept. 9. According to a front-page *Washington Post* story that day, the Army issued an order that reservists will serve on the ground in Iraq for tours of 12 months, when they had been expecting to serve a total of 12 months on active duty, including training and demobilization time. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers told the committee that more than half of the Army's combat support and combat service support functions are in the Army Reserve and the National Guard. "We need that combat support, combat service support, to be with our active forces, as long as they are in Iraq," he said.

The issue of the reservists revolved around whether more U.S. troops are needed in Iraq. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a vociferous sup-

porter of sending more troops, quoted from an attack on the Administration in the neo-conservative *Weekly Standard*, claiming that U.S. actions “are being driven by the realization that there are too few American troops in Iraq.” McCain called that “an accurate statement,” and said, “When we have to extend guard and reservists on active duty, when we have to ask for international forces, when we have to do the things that we are doing, it’s clear to me that we need additional troops” in Iraq.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), taking a different view, told the witnesses, “We had a policy to win the war, but it’s quite clear we didn’t have a policy to protect our troops after the war is over.” He noted that since the invasion of Iraq, the situations with Afghanistan, North Korea, Iraq, and the Middle East have all deteriorated. He said he had hoped to hear from President Bush, in his Sept. 7 address, acknowledgment of U.S. failures in Iraq. “The Administration has made a U-turn in its policy,” he said, “but it doesn’t know which direction it’s going in.”

Estrada Nomination Withdrawn by White House

On Sept. 4, Miguel Estrada wrote to President Bush seeking to withdraw his nomination to the D.C. Court of Appeals, which Bush then did. Both Republicans and Democrats painted Estrada as victim of a flawed confirmation process.

Estrada had been among President Bush’s first group of judicial nominees in May 2001. His nomination had been filibustered by Senate Democrats on the grounds that he had not answered questions about his views in sufficient detail and the White House’s refusal to

turn over memos he had written while working in the Solicitor General’s office.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) called it a sad day for Estrada and the confirmation process, saying that if Estrada had answered the questions and the White House had provided the requested documents, “we would have had a real debate about whether Mr. Estrada is qualified for a lifetime appointment to the second most powerful court in the nation.” He called Estrada “an unfortunate victim of a White House policy of not cooperating with the Senate and stonewalling in the appointment of judges.”

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) complained that the Senate had been denied a vote on the nomination “because of the obstruction of a few.” Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) charged that Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and the Democrats have had a plan “to alter the ground rules of confirmation.” Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) called the Democratic filibuster a “despicable disgrace.”

The partisan bickering over nominations is likely to continue. Bush’s response to the Estrada debacle was to name two more controversial nominees without consulting the Democrats. Senate Democrats, meanwhile, have vowed to continue to filibuster nominees they see as unacceptable.

House Votes To Impose School Vouchers in D.C.

House Republicans gained ground on an issue that has been on their agenda since Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) became Speaker of the House in 1995. On Sept. 9, the GOP succeeded in passing, by a vote of 209 to 208, a school voucher program for the District of

Columbia. Democratic Presidential politics played no small role in the GOP’s narrow victory, as two Democrats who oppose vouchers, Dennis Kucinich (Ohio) and Richard Gephardt (Mo.), were absent from the vote because they were in Baltimore participating in a Democratic Presidential candidates debate. The entire process was characterized by maneuvering by the Republicans, including the scheduling of the final vote during the Democratic debate, to ensure they had the votes in the chamber to win.

The voucher program came in the form of an amendment to the D.C. appropriations bill sponsored by House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-Va.). D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D) noted the irony of Davis’s amendment, in that it added legislation to an appropriations bill, which is normally a violation of House rules. Davis successfully raised points of order against other such amendments, but his amendment was protected by an order of the House Rules Committee.

The \$10 million program would provide vouchers of up to \$7,500 each to low-income parents to send their children to private schools. While the money does not come out of the D.C. public school budget, Norton pointed out that during the appropriations process, funds were shifted from other Federal education programs to fund the voucher program. That money, Norton said, “should perhaps be going toward adequately funding public schools,” for things like teacher training. Davis and other voucher backers argued that it was necessary to give some children a chance at a decent education, a chance they will not get in D.C. public schools. But as Norton and other voucher opponents pointed out, it will only be available to 1,300 students out of the 68,000 in the D.C. public schools.