

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Rep Censured for Calling 2000 Election a Coup d'État

The House GOP did not take kindly to Rep. Corrine Brown (D-Fla.) accusing them of having stolen the 2000 presidential election, on July 15. Brown's remarks came during debate on an amendment by Stephen Buyer (R-Ind.) to the Fiscal 2005 foreign operations appropriations bill, that would prohibit any official of the U.S. government from asking the United Nations to assess the validity of elections in the United States. The amendment was in response to a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sent by 12 members of the Congressional Black Caucus, requesting UN monitors to observe the U.S. Presidential election on Nov. 2. Buyer called the letter "rather foolish, nonsense and silly."

Brown went to the floor and told Buyer, "I come from Florida where you and others participated in what I call a coup d'état." She added that "over and over again . . . when you stole the election, you came back here and said, get over it." Buyer immediately demanded that Brown's words be stricken from the record, to which the acting chair, Rep. Doug Ose (R-Calif.), after some 20 minutes of consultations, agreed, ruling that under the House rules, one member cannot accuse another of committing a crime, such as "stealing" an election. Ose's ruling was upheld by a vote of 219 to 187. The Buyer amendment, itself, passed by a vote of 243 to 161.

In a statement issued afterwards, Brown charged that "striking my words from the House floor is just one example of the Republican Party's attempt to try to cover up what happened during the 2000 election, and of their activities in the state of Florida in preparation for stealing this year's election as well." She then described how votes

were thrown out, including the votes of many African-Americans, and how voters were wrongly disqualified from voting. She warned that with the use of electronic voting machines, flawed voter purge lists, and the partisanship of Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, a repeat of what happened in 2000 "remains a dangerous possibility."

Military Experts Debunk Rumsfeld's Iraq War

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's military incompetence became the theme of a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee that heard from three retired Army officers, including former Vice Chief of Staff Gen. John Keane, who retired, last year, rather than work for Rumsfeld as chief of staff. At one point, in response to questions from Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), Keane noted that while a great deal of intellectual capital was spent on how to take down the Saddam Hussein regime, almost none went into what to do about Iraq afterwards. In looking back at that process, one of the things that happened was "that many of us got seduced by the Iraqi exiles in terms of what the outcome would be." That is, that we would be greeted as liberators. "So, therefore, the intellectual capital to prepare ourselves properly for an insurgency was not there." Furthermore, "there were very few people who actually envisioned honestly before the war what we are dealing with now, after the regime went down."

Also testifying was retired Col. Douglas MacGregor, a long-time critic of how the Army organizes itself, who argued that a much more militarily competent plan of invasion would have had a much heavier ar-

mored force go in at the outset, driving immediately for Baghdad, and avoiding any fights with the Iraqi army "because we had an interest in preserving as much of it as possible so that it would be available to work with us in the aftermath." Following that would have been the rapid insertion of large quantities of infantry, with very specific rules of engagement, to immediately establish order, using local police and other officials, recognizing that most people were in the Ba'ath Party because that was the only way to get a job. He pointed to what both the Russians and the United States did in World War II to establish order in Europe. In Iraq, "we focused inordinately on a campaign to get there, and once we arrived we hadn't thought through any of these things." The result was, essentially, 30 days of chaos.

Democrats Push To Change Medicare Bill

On July 13, Rep. Martin Frost (D-Tex.) filed a discharge petition to force a bill onto the House floor that would give the Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs in the Medicare program. If the discharge petition gains 281 signatures, a simple majority of the 435 members of the House, then the bill would be forced out of committee and go directly to the House floor for consideration. By the following day, the petition had 165 signatures.

The discharge petition appears to be part of a larger Democratic strategy to overturn, or, at least, modify, the 2003 Medicare drug bill. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), speaking on the House floor on July 13, attacked the GOP for aiding the pharmaceutical in-

dustry by such things as refusing to pass legislation that would allow for the legal re-importation of prescription drugs from Canada, where many senior citizens are already buying their drugs because the prices are much lower. The Democrats, Pallone said, “feel very strongly that we have to continue to fight this new Medicare law and will work to provide seniors with a meaningful [drug] benefit. . . .”

Meanwhile, the Republicans are acting to head off the Democratic strategy. Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Orin Hatch (R-Utah), during a hearing on the implications of drug re-importation warned that re-importation might lead to an increase in counterfeit drugs, and to “diminished research into future lifesaving treatments.” Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), testifying as a witness, said the issue is not only affordable prescription drugs, but also “whether democracy will prevail on Capitol Hill or whether the pharmaceutical industry, which has spent hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years with lobbyists, with advertisements, with huge amounts of campaign contributions, will be able to force the American people to pay these outrageously high prices.”

House Condemns ICJ Ruling on Israeli Wall

The House took the side of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, on July 15, when it voted 361 to 45, in support of a resolution “Deploring the misuse of the International Court of Justice by a plurality of the United Nations General Assembly for a narrow political purpose.” The resolution treats the matter of the so-called security barrier solely from Sharon’s standpoint, and

doesn’t even mention that it encompasses a sizable chunk of the West Bank. It also condemns the Palestinian failure to implement the Road Map peace plan, but never mentions the Israeli government’s “14 reservations” to that plan. It places the entire responsibility for the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinians on the shoulders of the Palestinians.

However, very few members of the House seemed to even notice those deficiencies in the resolution. Only one member had the courage to speak out against the resolution on the House floor, that being Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.), who told the House that it would be passing “an unbalanced, unwise resolution that may undermine the interests of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as our own national interests.” She noted that while the resolution references the over 1,000 Israelis who have died in the violence since September 2000, it ignores the over 3,000 innocent Palestinians who have also lost their lives. “Just once, can this Congress not admit that Palestinians are people too, and that their lives are also precious?” She also noted that by only mentioning the Palestinian responsibilities under the Road Map, the resolution only tells half the story. She said, “The only way way to stop terrorism and secure the safety of Israel is for a comprehensive political solution to be negotiated with the Palestinians.”

House Votes To Impose Sanctions on Vietnam

Despite Rep. Chris Smith’s (R-N.J.) claim to the contrary, for some people the war in Vietnam still has not ended. The House voted 323 to 45, on July

19, to suspend the rules and pass a bill, called the Vietnam Human Rights Act, imposing sanctions on non-humanitarian aid to Vietnam, unless the President certifies that Vietnam has made progress towards releasing political and religious prisoners, has “made substantial progress” towards respecting freedom of religion, and “made substantial progress” towards returning properties confiscated from churches. Smith complained, during debate on July 16, that Vietnam has scoffed at the bill and dismissed the charges of human rights abuses, “pleading the tired mantra of interference in the internal affairs of their government. . . .”

Though small, the opposition to the bill was anything but silent. Rep. Lane Evans (D-Ill.) warned that the bill would endanger joint efforts by the two countries to recover the remains of American MIAs from the Vietnam War and “damage relations between our two countries.” Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), who said he has visited Vietnam four times in the last five years, said there are many people in that country “who share the hope of a more open and democratic society and who are working to achieve these goals,” but that Smith’s bill “will not help them.” He asked the House, “Does anyone . . . believe that the Congress ordering them to change an internal policy in the nation, no matter how desirous we may be of seeing change, is going to persuade the government in Hanoi to do it because we so order it?” Rep. Robert Simmons (R-Conn.), himself a veteran of the Vietnam War, noted that the issue of human rights cuts both ways. “The United States itself must be held accountable for its own moral obligations to the Vietnamese people for our past policies and practices,” he said.