

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Dems Pre-empt Bush's State of the Union

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) appeared at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 31 to rebut President Bush's State of the Union speech—two days before he was to deliver it. Pelosi laid out three principles that Democrats will adhere to in considering any proposed changes to Social Security: First, changes must not add to the deficit; second, no changes can begin by slashing benefits; and third, any changes must be fair, and not create a two-tiered system that treats current retirees different from younger workers. "Democrats will not allow this Administration to turn this proud entrepreneurial achievement of the New Deal into a raw deal for millions of Americans."

Reid called for an exit strategy from Iraq "so that we know what victory is and how we can get there; so that we know what we need to do, and so that we know when the job is done." He also blasted Bush's conduct of the war on terrorism and noted that the regions of the world that are prone to ideologies of hatred "are often places where people go hungry and live without hope."

Reid invoked Franklin Roosevelt, who said in 1945, "We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations, far away." Reid added that Roosevelt also said, "The only way to make a friend is to be one."

In response to a question from *EIR*, Reid called for a Marshall Plan for the United States. "Every city in America has blueprints stacked up, waiting to have the money to do something about sewer systems, water systems, bridges, dams, highways. . . . And if we

spent \$10 billion on the infrastructure of this country, we would create half a million new jobs. These are high-paying jobs, and the spin off from these jobs would be significant." He reiterated that terrorism breeds where people are destitute. "Terrorism really has incubators where there is no hope for people," he said, "and we have to step in and do things; to develop water projects. . . . There's billions of people every day who drink the water that makes them sick, and this is being ignored and I think it's to the detriment of our country."

Sensenbrenner Proposes Immigration Bill

As expected, House Judiciary Committee chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.) has introduced legislation with the immigration provisions that he championed last year, but that were removed from last year's intelligence reform bill. The bill would establish a uniform rule for all state driver's licenses so that they could be considered as identification for Federal purposes. This would include prohibiting states from issuing aliens with driver's licenses that have expiration dates later than the dates their visas expire. It would also "tighten" the asylum system to stop abuse, waive Federal laws so as to allow the completion of the San Diego border security fence, and make aliens deportable for terrorism-related offenses.

Sensenbrenner expressed confidence, on Jan. 26, that the House GOP leadership would give him the vote on the bill that they promised him last fall, although he was not so sure about the Senate. His problem may not be with the leadership, however, but rather with a rival bill sponsored by Govern-

ment Reform Committee chairman Tom Davis (R-Va.). The stand-alone bill Davis introduced on Jan. 26, covers only driver's license standards.

The Democrats, meanwhile, are hoping to be able to debate more comprehensive immigration legislation. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said at the National Press Club on Jan. 31, that little fixes here and there are not enough, nor will it work to attach the Sensenbrenner bill to the supplemental appropriations bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid complained that while the Bush Administration has been focussed on security, immigration services have been starved of resources to the point that "it's going to take years before you can actually get your citizenship."

Senators Push for More LIHEAP Funding

With severe winter weather blanketing much of the country, and oil still near \$50 per barrel, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is under more pressure than usual. In response, the Department of Health and Human Services announced, on Jan. 31, that it would be making an additional \$100 million in assistance available to the states, which is half of a \$200 million allotment granted by Congress, last fall.

The HHS announcement came four days after a letter to President Bush, signed by 50 members of the Senate, Republicans and Democrats, urging him to release the entire \$200 million. "Without emergency assistance," they wrote, "low-income seniors and families will face impossible choices this winter: whether to heat their homes or to eat. . . ."