

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Richard Perle Hit On Iraq War Lies

Richard Perle, who was one of the leading neo-con voices supporting the invasion of Iraq, was raked over the coals at a House Armed Services Committee hearing on April 6, and by a Republican, no less, Walter Jones of North Carolina. Jones began his attack by quoting a line from Perle's prepared statement, which he had declined to read to the committee, wherein he said, "There's reason to believe that we were sucked into an ill-conceived initial attack aimed at Saddam himself by double agents planted by the regime, and as we know the estimates of Saddam's stockpile of weapons of mass destruction was essentially wrong."

Jones said he was "just amazed" at that statement, and then began grilling Perle on his relationships to the neo-con apparatus that was planning the war and developing the fake intelligence that was used to justify it. Jones included the infamous "Clean Break" document prepared in 1996 for then-incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group headed by David Wurmser in the office of Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith.

After Perle lied, by denying he had any involvement in the "Clean Break" apparatus, Jones attacked the lies about Iraqi WMD that Perle helped to perpetrate, noting the frustration others have expressed to him because of the claim that Saddam Hussein was about to build a nuclear bomb, and so forth. "I will tell you I share this frustration," Jones said (at which point he was near tears, according to news accounts). "I've taken it upon myself to write letters to every family in America that's lost a loved one, and I sign them, by the way, myself. I have signed over 900 letters. . . . I am just incensed with this statement and I can-

not believe you [referring to committee chairman Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.)] would even allow that [WMD charge] to be printed, to be honest with you."

The following day, Jones told an interviewer from *Middle East Online*, "If I had known then, what I know today, I wouldn't have voted for that resolution [which in October 2002 authorized the President to go to war in Iraq]. Absolutely not."

'Bunker Busters' Face Uphill Battle

Last year, Rep. David Hobson (R-Ohio), the chairman of the House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, successfully shot down the Bush Administration's plans to "study" the development of so-called "bunker buster" nuclear weapons, by removing \$27 million in funding for the program. The bunker buster, technically termed "robust nuclear earth penetrator," however, has returned in the Fiscal 2006 budget, though on a much smaller scale. The Administration has asked for \$4 million for Fiscal 2006 and anticipates spending \$14 million on the program in 2007. National Nuclear Security Agency administrator Linton F. Brooks told the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on April 4, that the agency is now only looking at one type of existing warhead for possible conversion into bunker busters, rather than two. "If the funding is provided," he said, "we will gain enough knowledge to know whether the United States should further investigate the concept."

In the House, meanwhile, another effort is under way to kill the program. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) is

seeking support for a resolution he plans to introduce to strip funding for the study out of the budget. He, so far, has 89 co-sponsors. Markey told a reporter, on April 8, that "pursuing new nuclear weapons while telling other countries not to is like telling your kids not to smoke with a cigarette in your hand—no country will take our non-proliferation urgings seriously."

Halliburton's Overcharges Hidden From the UN

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), in an April 11 letter on Iraq reconstruction, addressed to House National Security Subcommittee chairman Chris Shays (R-Conn.), reports that, not only are Halliburton's overcharges on its Iraq oil contract greater than previously thought, but the Bush Administration has been hiding the evidence of those charges from the International Advisory and Monitoring Board (IAMB), the UN body charged with monitoring U.S. stewardship of the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI). The subcommittee has recently acquired five unredacted audits of six task orders executed by Halliburton's KBR unit showing \$212.3 million in overcharges by Halliburton (mostly for the transportation of gasoline into Iraq from Kuwait and Turkey), out of \$1.69 billion of work. Previously, the Pentagon was only making available redacted versions of the audits, not only to the subcommittee, but also to the IAMB.

According to Waxman's count, the redacted audits blacked out more than 460 references to overcharges by KBR, making them practically useless to the UN agency. Furthermore, according to Waxman, the redactions came at the request of Halliburton itself, which claimed that they were nec-

essary to protect proprietary information. However, as Waxman points out, overcharges found by government audits are not proprietary information, but are government information subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Waxman's letter came one day before the National Security Subcommittee held its third hearing on the UN Oil for Food program, whereas none so far, have been held on the U.S. abuse of the DFI. In his letter, Waxman noted that the reputation of Congress has "suffered from the perception that Congress is eager to draw attention to UN faults but reluctant to examine the mistakes and mismanagement of a Republican Administration."

Waxman's call for hearings was seconded by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), the next day in the subcommittee hearing. He demanded to know why former Coalition Provisional Authority head Paul Bremer has not been called to testify, and demanded an end to the hypocrisy. Both he and Waxman praised Shays for pursuing the undeducted audits and for agreeing to have a hearing in June.

Democrats Seek New GI Bill of Rights

Congressional Democrats are challenging the implicit assumption in the Republican budget, that military personnel and military veterans are too expensive, by offering up a package of provisions to improve access to health-care services and education benefits for veterans of both active duty services and the reserves. It also would make available to 400,000 eligible veterans concurrent receipt of retiree pay and disability pay; protect the income of reservists who currently

lose pay when they are activated; and include provisions on active duty end strength, and on insuring that troops have adequate equipment and supplies when they go into combat.

On April 12, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) evoked the memory of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who said that the original 1944 GI Bill "gave emphatic notice that the American people won't let our veterans down when they come home."

Pelosi also said that many of the provisions in the package are supported by Republicans, including one, a bill on concurrent receipt, sponsored by Rep. Mike Biliarakis (R-Fla.). Pelosi indicated that while no Republicans have endorsed the package as a whole, she thinks the Democrats can get pieces of it through, as they have in the past with the partial fix on concurrent receipt two years ago, and the increase in the death benefit more recently.

Flanking Pelosi were Reps. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) and Lane Evans (D-Ill.), the ranking Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee and Veterans Affairs Committee, respectively; retired Gen. Wesley Clark; and freshman Rep. John Salazar (D-Colo.). Clark, after having given the package a ringing endorsement, said, "It's got to go through. . . . Now, the American people, especially those who served and their families, are watching to see if we have the courage to follow through on the promises made to do what's right."

Senate Begins Debate On War Supplemental

The Senate began debate on the Bush Administration's Iraq War supplemental spending request on April 11. The Senate Appropriations Commit-

tee reported the bill, on April 6, with \$74.4 billion in spending, about \$500 million less than the request, and about \$2.4 billion less than the House-passed version.

Disagreement between the House and the Senate is not likely to be over the numbers, however, but rather on amendments concerning immigration. The House attached the so-called "Real ID Act," which would establish nation-wide Federal standards for state-issued drivers' licences and other identification, to its version of the bill before passage. That bill has little support in the Senate and is not part of the Senate supplemental bill. That's not going to stop some Senators from adding other immigration provisions, however. Sen. Larry Craig (R-Id.) has already stated his intention to bring up an amendment on agricultural guest workers, which has some support among Democrats.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) told reporters on April 12, that he was encouraging his colleagues to postpone the debate on immigration to a later time. "I think rather than a piecemeal approach on the supplemental," he said, "it would be in the best interest of this country . . . to take all the various interests, all the various immigration concerns and address them at one time in a comprehensive way."

Democratic Leader Harry Reid (Nev.) indicated that the presence of the Real ID Act in the House bill could, itself, be a real obstacle to passage of the supplemental. He warned that unless the Democrats can get some assurance that that would be taken out of the bill, in conference with the House, he would not be able to come to an agreement with Frist to limit amendments. "I would rather this were a clean supplemental bill," he said, "But they've created the problem, we haven't."