

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Congress must act to open PLO office in Washington

The U.S. Congress must act before the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) will be able to re-open its offices in Washington, State Department spokesman Michael McCurry reported on Sept. 17. "There is current legislation on the books which prohibits the establishment of a PLO office in the United States," said McCurry, referring to a law passed by Congress in 1990 which ordered the closing of offices the PLO maintained in Washington and New York.

In order to permit the White House signing of the PLO-Israel agreement on Sept. 13, President Clinton authorized renewal of official U.S. contacts with the PLO. According to McCurry, a State Department analysis of legislation dealing with the PLO had turned up six laws that bar PLO operations in the United States. McCurry said that the administration indicated that it was "willing to address those restrictions in a way that would allow us to continue a dialogue that would be valuable to the peace process." Since it involved legislation passed by Congress, however, McCurry added, there "does have to be a formal addressing of these issues by Congress itself." McCurry said that the administration would be "consulting" with Congress on this matter.

Clinton sold out Bosnia, McCloskey charges

In hearings on Sept. 15 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), one of the prime advocates in the U.S. Congress of action to halt Serbian genocide against Bosnia, lambasted Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Stephen Oxman for the Clinton administra-

tion's sellout of Bosnia.

McCloskey queried Oxman as to how the United States could reward Serbian war criminals for their aggression in Bosnia by supporting the "dismemberment and partition of Bosnia." McCloskey said that this was a contradiction of explicit U.S. policy during the entire Bosnian crisis and a violation of "all of our treaty obligations and principles."

Oxman attempted to defend administration policy by claiming that it had steadfastly supported a "negotiated settlement" and had "strongly urged" the Serbs and Croats to show greater flexibility in responding to Bosnian demands for more territory and access to the Adriatic Sea. Oxman whined that the administration could not "take a specific position on specific map issues or specific territorial issues" since "this is not our negotiation."

In fact, while the administration has formally claimed it supported the "territorial integrity" of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it has continually backed away from providing any military support to the Bosnians to defend that "integrity" as the Serbs (and later the Croats) began devouring the territory of the Bosnian state. McCloskey scored the administration for refusing to label the systematic killing of Bosnians and expropriation of their homes as "genocide." U.S. policy, McCloskey said, "is putting a gun to [Bosnian President Alija] Izetbegovic's head to accept this non-settlement that will be the death of his country."

Black Caucus, NOI agree to closer collaboration

The Congressional Black Caucus and the Nation of Islam, led by Minister Louis Farrakhan, announced that they were establishing a more formal

working relationship, at the conclusion of the Congressional Black Caucus's (CBC) Legislative Weekend in Washington on Sept. 16. Farrakhan was a guest speaker at the Caucus-sponsored town hall meeting entitled "Race in America."

"We want the word to go forward today to friend and foe alike that the Congressional Black Caucus, after having entered into a sacred covenant with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] to work for real and meaningful change, will enter into that same covenant with the Nation of Islam," said CBC Chairman Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.).

The Nation of Islam in Washington, D.C. has gained a well-deserved reputation for their effectiveness in cleaning up housing complexes overrun by the drug trade, generally recognized as the number-one threat to the black community, and has also played a prominent role in the fight against AIDS. In a declaration of unity that brought a standing ovation from the 3,500 people in attendance at the meeting at the Washington Convention Center, Mfume said, "No longer will we allow people to divide us." CBC membership increased 50% in the last election.

Gephardt comes out against NAFTA

House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), after giving qualified support to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) up to now, despite heavy pressure from his trade union base, announced on Sept. 21 that he couldn't support the treaty in its current form. Gephardt had wanted assurances that the administration would implement a job retraining program in exchange for his

support for the treaty.

President Clinton put the battle for the agreement with Mexico into high gear on Sept. 14. This followed entreaties by free-trade Republicans facing constituents enraged over the threat of losing their jobs, who complained that Clinton was not doing enough to fight for a treaty which he supported.

In Lansing, Michigan on Sept. 18, Ross Perot, Sen. Donald Riegle (D-Mich.), Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) and Rep. Helen Delich Bentley (R-Md.) called on Congress to reject the accord. Michigan was chosen because of the threat to the automotive industry. Riegle, who is facing a tough reelection campaign next year and has a predominantly blue-collar constituency, urged voters to reject for reelection any congressman who votes for NAFTA.

Simon pushes 'balanced budget amendment'

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) is again pushing a "balanced budget amendment" to the U.S. Constitution, attempting to rally the 67 Senate votes needed for passage. The proposal is a popular "solution" to the nation's budget deficit which would entrench into the Constitution the very same foolish policies which caused the deficit to go out of control.

When a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats tried to pass similar legislation last year, the measure lost by only nine votes. However, an influx of freshmen congressmen has supposedly increased chances for passage this year.

A number of senators are beginning to feel that support for such an amendment might garner them some sympathy from angry voters. Simon says that he has a commitment from

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) to let the measure come to a vote before the scheduled October adjournment.

Gonzalez wants more laws against red-lining

Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Banking Committee, is proposing the enactment of anti-red-lining legislation for non-bank financial institutions. Red-lining is a banking practice which defines a poor area and says, "We're not making any loans here."

In a speech to a Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas conference in San Antonio on Aug. 24, Gonzalez called for the law, which currently affects banks and thrifts, to be amended to include credit unions and other non-bank banks such as mortgage and insurance companies, according to an *American Banker* article printed in the Aug. 30 issue of *Investor's Business Daily*.

"Why should other credit-granting institutions be exempt" from the anti-red-lining provisions of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), he asked.

"As part of any consideration of banking reforms, Congress ought to consider expanding the scope of CRA to bring these institutions under its umbrella. . . . As major providers of credit, I believe these institutions have an obligation to help meet the increasingly critical needs of distressed communities," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez urged banks to look at such legislation as a useful self-policing mechanism. "Not many banks currently see CRA as a process of useful self-examination," he said. "Most see it as a pestilential requirement to have so many community meetings and document such and such outreach effort—a kind of file-stuffing require-

ment." Instead, he said, the act should be "a little watchdog on the corner that reminds us all that the cornerstone of sound banking is the humble, hard toil of working with your neighbors to see how best to serve the community."

Tsongas, Rudman push cuts in entitlements

A couple of Senate has-beens, Paul Tsongas and Warren Rudman, have hit the campaign trail, calling for scaling back Social Security and Medicare benefits. The campaign of the less-than-dynamic duo was launched on Sept. 20 in Washington before a clock allegedly recording the increase in the budget deficit.

At the same time, their Concord Coalition issued a budget plan and report which advocates a balanced budget by the turn of the century. Reducing entitlements to middle- and upper-income people, according to the report, is "the only realistic way to get control of the deficit." The report claims that "means testing" and other entitlement changes would save \$118 billion between now and the year 2000. The plan also calls for \$7 billion of additional defense savings; eliminating \$19 billion in domestic programs, including the space station and the superconducting Super Collider; limiting mortgage interest deductions; and \$71 billion in additional tax revenue.

The coalition is beating the drums as Congress begins to discuss the administration's national health care proposals and considers other spending cuts to supplement the anti-deficit package approved in August. Although entitlements have been off-limits until now in the "slash-and-burn" deficit reduction debate, the Tsongas-Rudman team would like to make this a target for gouging.