

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Craig demands currency board for Mexico

Larry Craig (R-Id.) demanded that a currency board be set up in Mexico to guarantee a "sound monetary policy," in remarks on the Senate floor on Jan. 27. Craig is one of several conservative Republicans who want to impose a currency board on Mexico which would peg the peso at a fixed rate to the U.S. dollar as a prerequisite for any loan guarantees. The currency board idea is a tool of British imperialism.

Craig proposed other conditions, including guarantees that tax policy will be "pro-growth," that wage and price controls be eliminated, and that there be reasonable and adequate collateral and full disclosure of how monies raised under the guarantee are disbursed.

"If the United States provides Mexico with the \$40 billion in loan guarantees and allows the current policies there to continue, we will be financing bigger government and government-controlled responses to the monetary problems there. Raising taxes and implementing wage and price controls were not part of our electorate's message last year, and I am not supportive of financing those problems in other countries," he concluded.

GOPers draw bead on Ron Brown

Commerce Secretary Ron Brown failed to disclose on his federal financial disclosure forms \$135,000 in partnership fees he received in 1993, William F. Clinger (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Committee on Reform and Oversight, alleged on Jan. 27. Earlier that week, 14 Republican senators, led by Commerce Committee

Chairman Larry Pressler (S.D.) and Lauch Faircloth (N.C.), asked Attorney General Janet Reno to look into allegations that Brown's failure to correctly report his finances was part of an effort to avoid paying taxes.

Reno said on Jan. 26 that the Justice Department would review the request "to determine what would be the appropriate response."

Brown has become a key target in the campaign of conservative Republicans to implement "government by subpoena." In statements on the House floor, Dan Burton (R-Ind.) called for an independent prosecutor to investigate the commercial dealings by Brown and his law firm.

Commerce Department spokeswoman Carol Hamilton called the Clinger charges "politically motivated" and part of "a well-orchestrated smear campaign." She said that Brown was a target since he had been considered by White House officials as the most likely choice to run President Clinton's 1996 reelection campaign.

Independent probe sought of Gingrich's GOPAC

Reps. David Bonior (D-Mich.), Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), and Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) renewed their call on the House floor on Jan. 30, for an outside independent counsel to investigate what DeLauro referred to as House Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-Ga.) "financial empire."

DeLauro pointed specifically to Gingrich's meeting with Rupert Murdoch a few months back which "raised questions because Mr. Murdoch has billions of dollars of business before the Congress." She dismissed Gingrich's denials that the meeting was important, pointing out that he has a history of doing favors and getting

contributions in return.

In his comments, Bonior referred to a story in the *Los Angeles Times* on the funding of GOPAC, an entity controlled by Gingrich, that said that "the size of the contributions solely to GOPAC from corporate donors with important interests before the federal government raises questions about prospects of preferential treatment."

Ben Jones, Gingrich's opponent for Congress in 1994, has filed an amended ethics complaint against the Speaker, charging that Gingrich will earn more than "the usual and customary value" in his book deal than that permitted by House rules. In his latest complaint, Jones said that Gingrich improperly solicited business representatives to buy videotapes of his college course and that he improperly intervened in a federal regulatory matter by writing to White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta urging that the Food and Drug Administration approve a home-testing kit for AIDS.

Privateers salivate over privatization windfall

So much ink has flowed during the last couple of weeks over the future of "public broadcasting" that one tends to lose sight of the motive behind attempts by conservative Republicans to "discard" the so-called "public trough," namely, to provide profitable outlets for those clever entrepreneurs for whom House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and company hope to cut taxes (and increase profits). The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) is being offered as the first victim by Gingrich and his henchmen.

The alleged aim of the privatization measure is to get the federal government out of the "subsidy business." As details become public,

however, the real agenda of the Republican "anti-statist" rhetoric becomes clearer. It was recently reported, for example, that Bell Atlantic Corp. and other telecommunications companies held discussions with Larry Pressler (R-S.D.), chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, on how they could become "primary funders" for the more popular (and therefore more profitable) PBS programs. In the legislation which established public broadcasting stations, Congress had explicitly prohibited profit-making companies from owning them.

In response to questions regarding the meetings, Pressler, anxious to avoid any allegations of conflict of interest, nevertheless admitted to the *Washington Post* that legislation to change the restrictions was a possibility. There are currently 650 public radio and 351 public TV stations in the United States. Bell Atlantic could well use an "inside track" like PBS, because it is preparing to go head-to-head against the cable television systems, offering television programming over its phone lines. Bell Atlantic recently joined up with two other regional telephone companies plus Hollywood mogul Michael Ovitz.

Tussle developing over national security policy

Secretary of Defense William Perry and Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed Republican efforts to take over control of national security policy, in comments before the House National Security Committee on H.R. 7, the National Security Revitalization Act, on Jan. 24. The bill was later passed by the committee in a 41-13 vote, with 11 Democrats voting with Re-

publicans.

Perry attacked the claim in House Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-Ga.) "Contract with America" that U.S. forces are "hollow." It is "a dangerous statement that misleads the American people and may confuse potential aggressors against the United States," he said.

Shalikashvili agreed with Perry, saying that both he and the other members of the Joint Chiefs object to that characterization of the state of U.S. forces.

Perry also contested GOP claims that the Pentagon was facing a \$150 billion shortfall in its five-year budget. "You may very well question whether the programs are the right programs," he said, "but my assertion to you is that they are adequately funded." He particularly objected to a provision in the bill which would set up a special commission to revamp strategy, warning that such a measure "usurps the responsibilities of the secretary of defense." If members find "that I'm incapable or unwilling to meet those responsibilities . . . you should ask me to step down," he said. He called the legislation "deeply disturbing."

Perry also objected to Republican moves to create a national missile defense system that would cost "tens of billions of dollars."

Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-S.C.) said that there was no "hard-and-fast commitment" to spend \$25 billion on a new system, but that the amount would depend on what figure could rally a majority of the House. GOPers later changed the language to read: to develop a national missile system at the "earliest *practical* date," rather than their previous formulation of "earliest *possible* date."

Perry and Shalikashvili objected to a provision to allow Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia to

join the NATO alliance by early 1999. "We should neither cajole nor legislate the other members of the alliance into making decisions that so strongly affect the national security," Shalikashvili said. In their only successful amendment to the bill, Democrats eliminated the 1999 deadline for offering membership in NATO to Poland and other eastern European nations.

Young declares war on Endangered Species Act

Don Young (R-Alaska), chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, attacked the environmentalist movement for practicing deceit, accused some federal agencies of committing outrageous actions, and promised a major overhaul of the system, in an interview with the Bureau of National Affairs, a private news agency, on Jan. 3. Young said that his agenda will focus on three issues: reforming the Endangered Species Act, wetlands regulations, and defense of private property rights.

Young said that Congress makes the laws, and that the only role of federal agencies should be, and with his legislation would be, to administer those laws.

Discussing the new wetlands regulations he is proposing, Young said that any federal agency can administer them. However, under the new rules, "they can't go beyond the law. . . . There won't be any regulation after we get done. . . . Any bill that comes out of my committee is going to have the provision that this is the law. If the agency can't implement the law, they come back to us, and we will change the law. No longer can a non-elected official change the policy of the Congress, the elected representatives of the people."