

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Senate approves Whitewater hearings

The Senate voted 96-3 on May 17 to create a special committee to investigate an array of questions connected to the Whitewater land deals involving President William Clinton and his wife Hillary. The hearings over the next nine months will keep attention focused on the alleged wrongdoings of the Clintons right up until the 1996 elections.

The hearings will likely begin after the July 4 recess, and will focus initially on the search of deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster's office after his death in July 1993. Two or three more sets of hearings will focus on alleged White House "interference" with a savings and loan investigation, and President Clinton's personal and campaign finances in Arkansas.

The investigation is expected to be highly partisan. Al D'Amato (R-N.Y.), who will chair the investigation, has said he wants to find whether there was any "orchestration" of testimony by White House and Treasury officials when hearings were held on the same subject in February and August 1994. Committee members will include the Senate Banking Committee plus two members of the Judiciary Committee, one from each party. Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), a Presidential candidate, will be one of the members of the committee.

### Simpson escalates attack on AARP

Alan Simpson (R-Wy.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy, began hearings on the financial status of the American Association of Retired Persons on May 25, contending that AARP abuses its non-profit status.

Simpson admits that his investigations are directly related to AARP's defense of Medicare funding. "If you're going to distort the national debate," he said, "then I think people ought to know who you are." Simpson is the co-author of legislation that would cut future Social Security benefits in order to ward off the "projected insolvency" of the nation's largest retirement program in the year 2030.

The AARP is the most important organization of retired people in the United States. It is an important player in both Presidential and congressional politics, and a determined opponent of the attempts to gut Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. AARP has begun a lobbying and letter-writing campaign to prevent the proposed cuts in Medicare outlined by the GOP Contract with America, and designated May 16-18 as "Medicare Protection Days." Bringing AARP into disrepute, possibly even causing legal actions to be brought against it, would blunt its campaign, thus assisting Republican attempts to gut the living standards of retirees.

### Gingrich supports 'family contract'

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and a variety of Republican Presidential and other hopefuls paid homage to Christian Coalition guru Ralph Reed and his "Contract with the American Family," in the Mansfield Room of the Capitol on May 17. "House Republicans are totally committed" to bringing each measure in the contract to a floor vote, Gingrich said. Even Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), still reeling from revelations about his investment some 17 years ago in "Beauty Queen," a pornographic film that was to be produced by his brother-in-law, came to pro-

claim his support of "Christian values."

The contract of the Christian Coalition, an organization set up by televangelist Pat Robertson, is intended by Reed to become the guideline for the Republican majority's second "100 days."

The contract calls for eliminating the Department of Education and transferring the funds to local school districts; limiting abortion and ending the use of Medicaid funds for abortion; allowing prayer in schools and establishing public funding of private and religious schools through vouchers; abolishing the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Legal Services Corp., which provides legal aid to poor and low-income people. Reed claims the contract is not solely a "Christian" agenda, but rather a "pro-family agenda."

### Supreme Court rules term limits unconstitutional

The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 on May 22 that states cannot set term limits for members of Congress, upholding the principle that individual voters choose who governs and for how long. The ruling overturns term-limits laws in 23 states.

Supporters of term limits have vowed to make the issue the subject of a constitutional amendment, the only route now for instituting such legislation. Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) has indicated that the Senate vote on a term limits measure would come "in the months ahead," although chances to get the two-thirds vote needed in the Senate appear to be slim.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has promised to make term limits the first vote in a GOP-controlled

House in the next Congress, in hopes of keeping the issue alive as an electoral issue for GOP candidates. Although term limits had been widely touted by most of the new Republican members during their campaigns, their fervor cooled considerably after they won.

In the opinion for the majority, Justice John Paul Stevens underlined that "permitting individual States to formulate diverse qualifications for their representatives would result in a patchwork of state qualifications, undermining the uniformity and the national character that the Framers envisioned and sought to ensure." The measure, Stevens added, would "erode the structure envisioned by the framers, a structure that was designed, in the words of the preamble of our Constitution, to form a "more perfect union."

## House revises Clean Water Act

The House passed a revision of the Clean Water Act by a vote of 240-185 on May 16. The action is a major step in revising environmental policy, but plays into the states' rights philosophy.

The legislation, drafted by Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, would reverse many of the environmental restrictions mandated by the 1972 law, transferring authority for enforcing anti-pollution standards from the federal government to the states. It exempts some industries from the toughest requirements of the 1972 legislation and allows them to discharge higher levels of pollutants into lakes and rivers. It replaces a requirement that industry pretreat storm water before it runs into waterways, with a less stringent state-

run treatment program. The bill also redefines what constitutes a wetland, significantly reducing the areas encompassed as federally protected wetland areas by the 1972 legislation. The bill says that marshy areas must be under water for at least 21 days during the growing season before they can be declared wetlands.

The revision will have a tougher time, however, when—and if—it is taken up by the Senate. John Chafee (R-R.I.), chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, has said he supports the existing statute and considers its revision a low priority. President Clinton has also threatened to veto the bill if it passes both houses.

## Christians, Muslims protest embassy move

A number of Christian and Muslim organizations came together to protest legislation introduced by Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) that would mandate a move of the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In a letter to Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), the Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of the Washington offices of various Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, urged the senator to oppose the "Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Implementation Act of 1995."

"Because of the sensitive nature of the peace talks and the fact that the permanent status negotiations on Jerusalem are scheduled to begin by this time next year, we do not believe that now is the time to begin the process of moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem," the letter read. The Dole measure "would cause the U.S. to violate its role as facilitator of the peace process by preempting the permanent status negotiations on Jerusalem and

could undermine the peace process itself."

A number of American Muslim organizations joined with the Christian churches in opposing the bill. In a statement released on May 21, the American Muslim Association for Democracy warned that Jerusalem, "the city of peace" and the "home of the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions . . . should not be dealt with in such a partisan matter that will have negative consequences on the fragile relationships of followers of these religions."

## Threat to U.N. funding passes Senate panel

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee in mid-May approved legislation sponsored by committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), which would withhold 50% of U.S. funding if U.N. actions do not conform with U.S. interests. A similar bill introduced by Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, would block one-third of the U.N. "peacekeeping" budget.

The action has provoked fears in Britain for its Balkan adventures. In an indication of how much importance is given the Balkan gambit, Britain has, according to the May 20 London *Times*, fronted most of the cash for Unprofor "peacekeeping."

"Many Republicans believe a contraction of U.S. funding will lead to the withdrawal of U.N. ground forces in Bosnia, and is a first step toward their goal to unilaterally lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian government," the paper said. Ending the embargo was "given a boost by a recent report by the Government Accounting Office, which said that Unprofor 'has been ineffective in carrying out mandates leading to a lasting peace.' "