

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Budget Resolution Clears House in Rancorous Debate

On March 20, the House passed the GOP budget resolution, but in a process that generated considerable partisan rancor. Republicans brought to the floor a rule for debate that prevented any amendments from being considered. Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier (R-Calif.) said that while it has been normal procedure to allow any number of substitute amendments to be considered, this time “no real alternatives were offered.” Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.), a member of the Rules Committee, responded, “The Republican leadership has blocked amendments offered by Democrats, all in an effort to adopt a flawed and disingenuous budget.” The rule was approved by a party-line vote of 222 to 206.

The situation did not improve when the debate moved to the resolution itself. John Spratt (D-S.C.) roasted the GOP plan. He castigated Republicans for including \$1.8 trillion in deficits over the next ten years, all of which, he said, would be paid for by the Social Security Trust Fund. He criticized the GOP for composing a five-year budget, instead of the more customary ten years, and said that the reason for this was so that the GOP could hide the effects of provisions that expire by 2010, including last year’s tax cuts. “This is a concerted strategy to shove everything forward and make the first five years as good as you possibly can by ducking the issue that will come just over the horizon,” he said.

The GOP response was typified by Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), who said that to fail to support the President’s budget, is to offer no budget for national defense, homeland security, or Social Security. “The other party,” he said, “has come here not to

praise any budget but to bury it.”

Simultaneous with the House debate, the Senate Budget Committee passed a Democrat-crafted budget resolution that is likely to be about as well treated by the Senate GOP as Democrats treated the GOP resolution in the House. Senate Republicans are complaining that the Democrat resolution increases domestic spending by some \$600 billion over current law, most of that in mandatory programs, and reduces defense spending \$245 billion below President George Bush’s request.

### FBI Told That Its Problems Must Be Fixed

On March 21, the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Pat Leahy (D-Vt.), held an oversight hearing on the Federal Bureau of Investigation, focussing on the belated production of documents related to the Oklahoma City bombing case. The documents were produced one week before the scheduled execution of Timothy McVeigh, convicted for that bombing. The Department of Justice’s Inspector General had just submitted a report on its investigation of the matter, and the DOJ’s inspector general, Glenn A. Fine, was at the witness table.

In his opening statement, Leahy focussed on the problems admitted in Fine’s report. He said that in the emergency anti-terrorism legislation passed last November, the FBI was given “unprecedented powers. We want to make sure, in a democratic society, that we balance those.” He said what was troubling about the Oklahoma City documents, “was the conclusion that senior FBI personnel failed to notify either the prosecutors . . . or high-ranking Justice Department officials . . . about the belated

document production problems.” He said that among the problems revealed by the IG’s report are “structural and management” and information management problems. He warned Fine and the FBI officials accompanying him, that in return for giving the FBI more powers and more money, “the quid pro quo is that the problems will be fixed. This committee . . . will not authorize more money, nor will the Appropriations Committee appropriate it if the problems are not being fixed.”

Republicans, on the other hand, seemed to be more concerned to establish that the documents had no effect on the convictions of McVeigh or Terry Nichols. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said, “I take comfort that the IG uncovered no information that would even suggest that these men were not the perpetrators of the horrible crimes for which they were convicted.” Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) portrayed the documents as essentially irrelevant. Fine agreed that many of the documents were “utterly useless and insignificant.”

### More Money Sought for Anti-Terrorism War

On March 21, the Bush Administration sent a supplemental appropriations request for more money for the war on terrorism, and for homeland defense, up to Capitol Hill. About \$14 billion would go to the Pentagon and intelligence agencies for the war in Afghanistan and the pursuit of terrorists elsewhere. The rest includes \$5.2 billion for homeland security, \$1.7 billion in international assistance and embassy security, \$750 million for aid to dislocated workers, and \$5.5 billion for assistance to New York City. “I know it’s a lot of money,” President

George Bush said in El Paso, Texas, “but we fight for freedom.”

While significant opposition to the request is not expected, it comes amid a dispute between Congress—especially Senate Democrats—and the White House, over whether Tom Ridge, the director of the White House Office of Homeland Security, should testify before Congress. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said on March 21 that “somebody ought to come up and explain just how you’re going to spend [\$38 billion for homeland security] and who it’s going to affect, how the states are going to deal with these new responsibilities.” He said that these questions are going unanswered, “in large measure because Mr. Ridge refuses to testify.”

The White House says that Ridge is a White House adviser and therefore should not testify. On ABC’s “This Week” on March 24, Ridge said that his office was created by Executive Order, and he has no authority over the spending for homeland security. That money is under the control of those agencies, such as Health and Human Services, or the Federal Emergency Management Administration, that get the funds. “I will not oversee the expenditure of those dollars,” he said. Ridge has been negotiating with Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) to find some way to meet the needs of Congress, but in an alternate forum. So far, Byrd has not accepted Ridge’s suggestions for closed-door briefings.

## **W**arner Warns Tenet About Unilateral Attack on Iraq

John Warner (R-Va.) warned of the consequences of a unilateral attack on Iraq by the United States, during a

March 19 hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said that such an adventure would likely create more terrorism, not less, and would bring down the governments of Islamic nations friendly to the United States.

The witness, CIA head George Tenet, had presented a statement along the lines of the axis of evil, much to the joy of Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), and said that he could only answer questions on Iraq, in closed session. Warner said that there is speculation in the press every day on “taking out Saddam Hussein militarily if all other avenues diplomatically, in the end, fail.” He agreed that Iraq is a danger, but said: “I think we have an obligation to talk about what are the consequences . . . if we have to go it alone.”

“Who fills the vacuum?” if Saddam Hussein is removed from power, Warner asked. “Are there persons that exist that can step in and gain the confidence of the Iraqi people and lead that nation, hopefully, in a direction that’s more compatible with a degree of democracy and freedom in that part of the world? We will also have to evaluate—and this is my question to you—in the aftermath, what is the likely degree of increase in the threats to this nation by means of terrorism . . . , how do we go about evaluating the degree of the increase of terrorist attacks, particularly by individuals who are ready to give up their lives, willingly, to bring further damage on our nation?”

When Tenet twice gave evasive answers, Warner cut him off. “I think it’s important that we begin to spend a lot of time on this subject and try as best we can to inform the American people and others of the consequences of a significant military action to take out Saddam Hussein,” he said.

Tenet evaded whether a U.S. at-

tack on Iraq might bring down friendly governments. Warner told Tenet that he hoped President George Bush would consult with Congress before launching any action against Iraq. “It is a major, major decision that we’ve got to prepare the American people for what the consequences would be,” he said. “Yes, we would destroy weapons of mass destruction, the ability of that nation to produce it. But in the wake, would we spawn a higher, much higher degree of terrorism?”

## **C**ampaign Finance Reform Will Face Court Test

On March 20, the Senate voted 60-40 to send the campaign finance reform bill to the White House, where President George Bush has said that, while the bill is flawed, he plans to sign it. The vote followed two days of protracted debate, and an agreement to language allowing the bill to be challenged in court almost as soon as it is signed by the President. The provision allows for an expedited procedure in front of a three-judge panel, with appeal directly to the Supreme Court.

Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), the bill’s leading Senate opponent, said after the vote, “We’ll be going to court, soon.” He said that he is confident that a court will agree to hear the case. The following day, he said that the legal team that will be leading the challenge will include Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr, and Floyd Abrams, the man who argued the Pentagon Papers case for the *New York Times* in the early 1970s. “This is a mission to preserve the fundamental constitutional freedom of all Americans to fully participate in our Democracy,” McConnell said. He said that both sides wish to resolve the case before Nov. 6, the date the bill is to take effect.