

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Ethics investigation against Gonzalez rebuffed

The House rejected in a vote of 216-150 on Sept. 18, a resolution by Rep. Larry Combest (R-Tex.) to launch an ethics committee investigation of Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Banking Committee, for allegedly revealing classified information about the Bush administration's pre-war dealings with Iraq.

Gonzalez has been consistently harassed by the Department of Justice because of his probing of the Bush administration pre-war relationship with Iraq, and his efforts to obtain material relating to that issue have been continually sabotaged.

The House vote was split along party lines. Gonzalez characterized the resolution as simply another effort by the administration to intimidate him. A similar move in August by House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-Ill.) was also defeated.

Court reverses Senate impeachment of judge

In a ruling on Sept. 17, a federal judge reversed the 1989 Senate conviction of Judge Alcee L. Hastings on charges of corruption, arguing that Hastings was tried improperly by a Senate committee instead of by the full Senate. "The Constitution states explicitly," reads U.S. District Judge Stanley Sporkin's ruling, "that an impeachment shall be tried by the Senate. This court holds that a trial by the Senate means by the full Senate and not by a committee of the Senate."

Hastings, Florida's first black judge, was acquitted of bribery and conspiracy charges in a 1983 criminal trial. Nevertheless, the Senate Judi-

ciary Committee determined to take up impeachment proceedings against Hastings, which led to his removal from the bench. The decision by Sporkin is the first instance in which a Senate conviction has been overturned by a federal judge.

The Sporkin judgment does not restore Hastings to the bench, but instead orders a new trial, this time before the full Senate. The Hastings case will undoubtedly come before the U.S. Supreme Court. Hastings is presently in an Oct. 1 Democratic primary runoff for Florida's 23rd Congressional District against state Rep. Lois Frankel. The senators responsible for the Hastings impeachment insist that they gave him a fair trial and intend to fight the reversal of their decision, the chamber's attorney told reporters on Sept. 18.

Death penalty referendum likely on D.C. ballot

The District of Columbia in all probability will include a referendum on the ballot on whether to introduce the death penalty when voters go to the polls in November. The measure is included in the D.C. Appropriations bill, which will be taken up by House and Senate conference committee negotiators before Congress adjourns.

The measure was a counter-proposal by Sen. Brock Adams (D-Wash.) to blunt a measure offered by Sen. Richard Shelby (D-Ala.). Shelby wanted to mandate the death penalty for the District, whereas the Adams proposal would put it to a vote. The referendum would allow juries to impose death sentences on anyone convicted of murder in the District. In cases where juries determine that capital punishment is too severe a punish-

ment, they could sentence a murderer to life imprisonment without parole.

The measure has yet to be voted on by the House, but observers believe that in the present climate, the measure will likely pass. District politicians predict that any referendum will be very close. Despite the high murder rate, there is significant opposition to the death penalty in the predominantly black city.

Suspension of nuclear testing voted by Senate

The Senate voted 55-40 on Sept. 18 to approve a nine-month nuclear testing moratorium, and a total ban by 1996. The move was the more radical of two proposals submitted during the course of the debate.

The moratorium proposal was co-sponsored by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) and Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.). The proposal was immediately endorsed by Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton as he was making a campaign appearance at the Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. President Bush has promised to veto the measure.

The Senate vote fell far short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto, but the issue will likely become more prominent in the presidential campaign.

Solarz, Atkins lose their primaries

In surprise upsets, Reps. Steve Solarz (D-N.Y.) and Chester Atkins (D-Mass.) were defeated in primary elections on Sept. 15.

Solarz, a senior member of the

House Foreign Affairs Committee, had his Brooklyn district carved up six ways in reapportionment and, as a result, he attempted a run in an Hispanic district against four Hispanic candidates. In spite of a crash-course in Spanish, Solarz was trounced by Nydia M. Velasquez.

Solarz was a leading member of the pro-Israel faction in the Congress and served as the Democratic point-man for the administration when President Bush was trying to rally support for his Persian Gulf war. Solarz also racked up 743 overdrafts at the House Bank.

A number of incumbents facing tight races, however, did succeed in getting their party's nomination for the November elections. Rep. Gerry Sikorski (D-Minn.), with 700 bad checks, succeeded in defeating Hennepin County Commissioner Tad Jude.

In Massachusetts, Rep. Joseph Early (D) also a victim of the check-bouncing scandal, Rep. Gerry Studds (D), and Rep. Nicholas Mavroules (D), who is facing federal extortion and racketeering charges, all won their primaries.

In Oklahoma, Democrat Mike Synar succeeded in beating back a challenger for his seat.

Funding for Supercollider restored in committee

In an amazing about-face after an overwhelming House vote to cancel the planned Superconducting Supercollider, House and Senate conferees on Sept. 15 earmarked \$517 million for the Supercollider. The funding is part of a \$22 billion energy and water development appropriations package that will now be returned to the House

and the Senate for final approval.

Conferees split the difference between the \$550 million approved in August by the Senate and the \$483.7 million allocated by the House Appropriations Committee before the House voted to ditch the project. The figure falls \$133.3 million short of the funding sought by the Bush administration, but is significantly higher than the amount needed to keep construction work on track.

NAFTA agreement still a political pawn

Testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee on Sept. 17, House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) continued to express "doubts" about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) treaty, recently signed between Mexico and the United States. While reiterating his belief that "a well-negotiated NAFTA can be a force for growth and good in this hemisphere," Gephardt called the treaty as presently negotiated a "second-rate agreement."

Gephardt said that there were serious problems with the treaty's environmental clauses and that it lacked needed worker adjustment clauses to compensate American workers laid off by the transfer of jobs to Mexico.

House Majority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.), also testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee, called the treaty "a sellout of American workers for generations to come." Bonior notes how factories had already moved south of the border in order to avoid much stricter U.S. environmental regulations. Bonior said that this shift would lead to a reduction of the wages of those U.S. workers still employed. "We can't let jobs become our number-one export." Bonior

or encouraged his colleagues to reject the NAFTA treaty.

Similar election year skepticism has been shown by Senate Democrats, who have been avid supporters of the treaty, but who balked when it was clear that the treaty was under heavy fire from the trade union movement. Criticism of the treaty's environmental "flaws," also give the Democrats an opportunity to court the environmentalists without endangering their labor constituency.

Bill would kill 'Thornburgh Doctrine'

In response to the outrage of Mexico over the U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the so-called Thornburgh Doctrine, under which a Mexican citizen was kidnaped on Mexican soil and brought illegally to the United States to stand trial, Sens. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Paul Simon (D-Ill.) introduced on Sept. 18 an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which, without outrightly abrogating the Thornburgh Doctrine, could effectively emasculate it.

The legislation explicitly prohibits any officer, agent, or employee of the U.S. government from "authorizing, carrying out, or assisting, directly or indirectly, the abduction of any person within the territory of any foreign state exercising effective sovereignty over such territory without the express consent of that state." All very clear-cut.

However, the amendment also states that any person brought to the United States in violation of that stipulation "shall not be prosecuted by the U.S. government if the state in which such abduction occurred objects." If there is such an objection, the person "shall promptly be returned to the state in which the abduction occurred."