

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Sanctions against North Korea urged by House

The House urged sanctions against North Korea if Pyongyang does not allow inspection of its nuclear program, and urged the rescheduling of U.S.-South Korea "Team Spirit" war games, in a non-binding "sense of the Congress" resolution approved on June 8 by a vote of 415-1. The war games were suspended in an effort to win North Korean agreement to nuclear inspections.

Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) urged the House to act quickly, before the issue of sanctions were taken up by U.N. Security Council. Washington's U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright said on June 7 that she was negotiating a sanctions resolution for U.N. consideration.

Republican calls for action against North Korea are becoming louder. In hearings before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on June 9, the State Department's point man on Korea, Robert Gallucci, said the U.N. Security Council would need considerable time to work out possible sanctions against Pyongyang and that he could not predict whether China would agree to sanctions.

Jim Leach (R-Iowa), demanding "punishment" against North Korea, said: "We are operating a policy as if we can stop a crime being committed, but it is clear that a crime is under way."

### Rostenkowski vows to fight indictment

Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), the former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, under indictment on "corruption" charges, has rejected any plea agreement and vowed to fight the charges and "wash away the mud that has been spattered" on

his reputation. At a press conference following a hearing before U.S. District Judge Norma Holloway in Washington on June 10, Rostenkowski said, "Talk is cheap" and "allegations come easy. . . . I will fight and I will prevail."

Rostenkowski's lawyer, Dan Webb, called the charges "completely overblown." Webb noted that the indictment "raises some grave and serious constitutional concerns. . . . Who determines what are official expenditures? We will examine that."

Rostenkowski is charged with defrauding the government of over \$500,000 by keeping employees on the payroll who did little or no official work, and misusing funds from the House Post Office. Because of the indictment, Rostenkowski was forced to temporarily step down from the chairmanship of the Ways and Means Committee.

### Health care bill passes first hurdle

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, in the first step toward some sort of health care package, on June 9 approved a bill guaranteeing health insurance for all Americans. The bill's author, committee chairman Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), hailed its passage as "the opportunity of a generation."

The vote was 11-6, with one Republican, Jim Jeffords (Vt.), crossing party lines to back the measure. "There was a lot of pressure for me to vote against this bill, and a lot of pressure for me to vote for it," said Jeffords, who plans to team up with other moderates to try to nudge the bill toward the center when it reaches the full Senate.

Republicans rejected the bill as too regulatory and too costly. They

found particularly objectionable the requirement that businesses pay 80% of workers' insurance, and a cost control measure that would set limits on insurance prices if they continue to rise too rapidly.

Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, unveiled his version of a health care bill which would raise the 24¢ federal cigarette tax to \$2 a pack and boost handgun ammunition taxes in order to finance health care.

Five committees are trying to write major health bills, and all have faced months of delays because of ideological and partisan conflicts as well as more mundane technical problems with budget data.

Kennedy said he hoped to get Republican support for a health bill this summer, after his bill is blended with whatever proposal comes out of the Finance panel. "We're looking forward to continue working with the Finance Committee, the majority leader, and the House to take what is really the opportunity of a generation before this Congress, to deal with an issue which is as compelling in importance as Medicare and Social Security," he said. Kennedy modified Clinton's bill, turning mandatory insurance purchasing alliances into voluntary ones, and allowing several alternative ways of buying insurance.

Companies with fewer than 11 employees and average wages of under \$24,000 will be exempt from the employer mandate, although they will have to pay a 1-2% payroll tax, depending on their size. Low-wage workers will get subsidies to help them purchase health insurance.

Moynihan's plan has a similar provision, although the exemption extends to firms with up to 20 workers. Kennedy's plan allows people the option of selecting from the identical menu of health plans that serve senators and other federal employees. It

also introduces a long-term care insurance program, with incentives for people in their 30s and 40s to start making provisions for their old age. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) has said that he will refuse to support any health care bill which involves employer mandates.

## **Whitewater hearings set to begin in July**

The Senate approved a resolution sponsored by Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) by a vote of 56-43 on June 14, setting hearings on the so-called Whitewater affair to begin no later than July 29.

The focus of the hearings will be narrow, concentrating only on the first phase of Special Counsel Robert Fiske, Jr.'s investigation, including: contacts between the White House and the Resolution Trust Corp. regarding the failed Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan Association and its ties to Whitewater Development Corp.; the Park Police investigation into the death of White House Deputy Counsel Vincent Foster; and the White House handling of Foster documents, including those removed by the White House after Foster's body was found on July 20, 1993.

Republicans attempted to force a full-blown Senate investigation of the affair. An amendment to an unrelated bill, proposed by Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), called for hearings on all aspects of the financial dealings surrounding Whitewater, as well as Hillary Rodham Clinton's commodity futures trading, which allegedly netted her \$100,000 on a \$2,000 stake.

But Mitchell insisted on a more confined inquiry. "We will not be a party to a political circus," he said.

Republicans wanted a panel of 18

senators equally divided between the two parties, and to allow Republicans to issue subpoenas without Democratic consent—a proposal Mitchell said was unprecedented.

Meanwhile, on the House floor on June 9, Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) and Dan Burton (R-Ind.) attacked Clinton's connections to Dan Lasater, an Arkansas businessman who had been indicted and convicted of dealing in drugs. The two are demanding that Fiske focus on the Lasater connections, warning that if he doesn't, they will attack the Fiske investigation as a "coverup."

Dornan and Burton are focusing on the drug-running operations around Mena, Arkansas, exposed in the book *Compromised: Clinton, Bush and the CIA*, by Terry Reed and John Cummings. Although the Mena operations occurred during the time Clinton was governor, they were an integral part of a U.S. intelligence operation under the direction of Oliver North and then-Vice President George Bush. If Dornan and Burton succeed in bringing to the fore the drug-running operations, the targets may not be President Clinton, as they hope, but rather Bush and Senate candidate North.

## **Funding for Nation of Islam-linked firm hit**

A group of 25 House Democrats and Republicans has appealed to Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros to terminate federally funded security contracts with a private firm associated with the Nation of Islam and its leader, Minister Louis Farrakhan. In a letter to Cisneros, they complained about funding going to a "hate group."

The Nation of Islam has played a major role in cleaning up some of the

worst drug-infested areas in the black community in at least five major cities. They have also initiated very successful programs in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere to combat and to treat AIDS.

In a letter to Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), the initiator of the action, on May 27, HUD Assistant Secretary William Gilmartin said that HUD "does allow all public and private owners of subsidized properties to procure the services of firms which have successfully met the procurement requirements."

The Nation of Islam has been a systematic target of allegations of "anti-Semitism" by the Anti-Defamation League. The attacks escalated when the group began to develop closer ties to the Congressional Black Caucus.

## **Conservative Christians protest EEOC guidelines**

A number of conservative Christian groups protested federal guidelines aimed at combatting religious harassment, warning that the proposals, far from helping to fight religious bigotry in the workplace, would in effect prohibit any expression of faith in occupational settings. The guidelines were issued last year by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

In statements to the media and before a Senate subcommittee on June 10, representatives of a variety of religious organizations said that the guidelines would have a "chilling effect" on displays of faith at work and called for their removal.

Michael Whitehead, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, said the guidelines would encourage employers "to ban all means of religious expression in order to avoid a possible lawsuit."