

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Clinton commended on Haiti, but shadows remain

The House commended President Clinton and his negotiating team for averting an invasion of Haiti at the last moment, in a concurrent resolution which passed by a vote of 353-45 on Sept. 19. Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) called Clinton's breakthrough "a remarkable triumph of diplomacy. . . . At a time when many thought that the United States had exhausted every avenue for peace and democracy in Haiti . . . the President of the United States has proven them wrong." He said that although Clinton knew that the United States can never abdicate its leadership, "even when force is required," he "also knew that there is a kind of leadership that is tougher than force, a kind of commitment that is mightier than the mortar shell, and that is the commitment not just to peaceful ends, but to peaceful means to achieve them. It is easy to force a conflict. It is a lot harder to forge a real peace."

Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), while expressing relief that offensive warfare operations were avoided, reminded the President that Bosnia still remains a challenge. "We need serious leadership there by our President," he said, "to lift the arms embargo and set Bosnia free. We have an interest in Haiti. There is even more at stake in Bosnia."

Despite Republican support for the resolution, there was concern over the President's actions. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), the ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said that "even as the President has committed the United States to a long-term mission in Haiti, he has yet to explain to the Congress or the American people the nature and terms of that commitment or the role that United States forces will play as part of the proposed follow-on United Na-

tions peacekeeping operation."

More cynical comments came from Dana Rohrbacher (R-Calif.): "Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. America. You are now the proud parents of another little country filled with new dependents who are looking to you for their food, shelter, clothing, and other essentials."

Black district in Georgia ruled illegal

A federal appeals court threw out state-drawn boundaries of a black-majority congressional district in Georgia and placed the election on hold so that the judges can redraw the district themselves. The Georgia case is the third court decision in the southern states (also Louisiana and Texas) to reverse redistricting which was conducted by the states in accordance with new federal legislation aimed at giving black voters a more proportionate representation in the U.S. Congress. Attempts are also afoot to reverse the creation of black congresswoman Corrine Brown's district in Florida.

Cynthia McKinney (D), the elected representative from the disputed 11th C.D. in Georgia, compared the courts' actions to "Chinese water torture." "This is the kind of decision that gives hope to people that are still whistling Dixie," she said.

Among the plaintiffs in the suit against McKinney's seat which led to the panel's decision, is George De Loach, a white former mayor of Waynesboro who lost to her in the 1992 primary.

Both the Georgia Attorney General's office and the U.S. Department of Justice said that they would appeal the move to the U.S. Supreme Court, which would have to grant a stay in

order for this fall's elections to go forward. In the Louisiana case, the objection was made that the district was geographically extended in an arbitrary manner, whereas McKinney's district is very compact. All of these cases may come before the Supreme Court, which will likely rule on them before the end of the year.

Gonzalez delays action against derivatives

House Banking Committee Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) cancelled the committee mark-up of his "Derivatives Safety and Soundness Supervision Act," which he had scheduled for Sept. 21 in hopes of clearing the legislation for House action this session. Gonzalez is determined to introduce new derivatives legislation as early as possible next year.

On Sept. 16, Undersecretary of the Treasury for Domestic Finance Frank Newman wrote Gonzalez asking him to postpone action on the legislation, calling such action premature. "The financial regulators have taken numerous steps to control the risks posed by financial derivatives," he wrote. "The administration has not identified a need for legislation regarding derivatives at this time. . . . If our future work leads us to conclude that legislation is needed . . . we will contact you promptly and will be eager to work with you to develop an appropriate bill."

According to committee sources, Treasury is loathe to anger investors by taking action on derivatives in the middle of an election year. Newman told Gonzalez that a "working group on financial markets," under the direction of Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, was compiling a list "of the ac-

tions that the financial regulators have taken during the last year and a half to deal comprehensively with these issues.”

The chairman of the House Subcommittee on Financial Institutions, Stephen Neal (D-N.C.), whose subcommittee is responsible for the legislation, is also not anxious to push the legislation forward, seeing it as simply a means of “pressuring” the financial regulators, rather than as a means of gaining some kind of government control over this highly leveraged market.

Moynihan urges delay on health care reform

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) is urging his colleagues to end their efforts to pull together even a modest health care reform bill in the remaining 14 working days of this year’s legislative session.

Moynihan’s attitude is at odds with the efforts of Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), who is working on a bipartisan “mainstream” proposal in an attempt to reach agreement this year. Mitchell said that the group “remained committed to this effort and united in the belief it is both possible and desirable to get a bill passed this year.”

Others are more skeptical. Some Republicans say that the only way to pass a health bill this year is for leaders of both parties to agree on a package and for the House and Senate to pass the same piece of legislation, an unlikely outcome. The “mainstream” group has essentially rewritten a bill earlier crafted by Moynihan in the Finance Committee.

No agreement has been reached, however. The “mainstream” proposal

is a package of insurance regulations that would prohibit insurers from denying coverage to sick people or to individuals when they change jobs. The legislation contains Medicare and Medicaid cuts that would be used to fund subsidies for low-income people and to reduce the deficit. Supporters of the “mainstream” proposal claim that it would lead to 92% of the public having health insurance by the year 2004.

Another “incremental” plan supported by liberal Democratic senators led by Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), would guarantee health care for children and provide limited long-term care for the elderly. However, fixation on the deficit and opposition to any form of federal regulation of health care is effectively whittling down the scope of President Clinton’s envisaged universal health care reform.

Russian-U.S. science foundation gets funding

House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman George Brown (D-Calif.) announced on Sept. 19 that the Department of Defense has approved the reprogramming of \$10 million from its budget to start up the U.S.-Russian Science Foundation. Private initiatives to support Russian and former Soviet scientists, such as that of George Soros, are not adequate, Brown stated.

Two years ago, out of frustration with the Bush administration’s foot-dragging on U.S. government support for Russian scientists, Brown introduced a bill, which passed the Congress, to set up the AmeRus Foundation. This foundation was to be funded by the government, but independent of specific agency budgets, to support research conducted jointly by teams

from the United States and former Soviet republics.

Although the Congress appropriated \$25 million from the FY 93 Defense Department budget for the foundation in October 1992, none of that money has been spent. Until now, there has been no agreed-upon program or approach and the funds have been sitting idle.

The current proposal involves pairing each Russian scientist with an American investigator. This should alleviate DOD concerns that there be oversight over the programs and the money. The proposed research projects would be chosen, after peer review, by the National Science Foundation.

Uphold separation of powers, says Rostenkowski

Lawyers for Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) took issue on Sept. 19 with the prosecution’s description of the former House Ways and Means Committee chairman as a common thief. Defense lawyer Dan Webb argued that because of the separation of powers, “The Constitution provides certain protections against Executive and Judicial branch intrusion that do not apply in an ‘ordinary mail fraud case.’ ”

Rostenkowski is charged in a 17-count indictment with having engaged in a pattern of corrupt activities that spanned three decades. His lawyers are asking U.S. District Judge Norma Holloway Johnson to dismiss the case because of the separation of powers. “In its apparent zeal to prosecute a prominent member of Congress, the Justice Department tries to obfuscate or ignore constitutional principles that prevent this case from going forward,” said Thomas M. Buchanan, a member of the defense team.