

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Senate spars over independent counsel

On March 14, the Senate began debate on a resolution calling on Attorney General Janet Reno to apply for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate allegations of illegal fundraising practices during the 1996 Presidential election campaign. The debate began the day after the Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee sent a letter to Reno asking her to report to the committee in 30 days as to the status of the Department of Justice's investigation and the reasons for her determinations as to how it should proceed.

The Democrats wasted no time blasting the resolution as a partisan attack. In a press conference, Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said that the resolution was not only "unnecessary, it's extraordinarily politicized." Daschle said that he thought that part of the reason Republicans are doing it is "because they don't have anything else to do," a reference to the lack of action on the budget.

Carl Levin (D-Mich.) gave as another reason, the fact that the independent counsel statute covers Congress as well as the Executive branch, but Lott's resolution only covers the White House and a few other agencies. "This resolution," Levin said, "is obviously an effort again, to partisanize a statute which, at its very heart and soul, is intended to take politics out of this kind of area and this kind of investigation."

Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), following up on Levin's remarks, said the resolution is "like sending a group of firemen to put water on just half a burning house."

Pat Leahy (D-Vt.) said from the floor that not only would the resolution fail constitutional muster if it were a

bill, but also that "it comes at the end of a week in which the Senate rejected the Majority Leader's version of a resolution to restrict the Governmental Affairs Committee investigation." He added, "It is an inappropriate effort to pressure the Attorney General to prejudice these matters."

Lott, in a statement during the floor debate, referred only to allegations concerning the Clinton-Gore campaign, the White House, and the Democratic National Committee. He completely ignored allegations concerning Republican fundraising practices, such as the widely reported distribution of campaign contributions by House Republican Conference Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) while on the House floor last year.

### Greenspan is warned not to hike interest rates

In a press conference on March 10, Sens. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), and Jack Reed (D-R.I.), and Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.) blasted Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan for talking about a "preemptive strike" against inflation during his appearances on Capitol Hill the previous week. Harkin announced that they were sending a letter to Greenspan "urging the Fed not to raise interest rates unless it can point to clear and specific signs that we have accelerating inflation."

Harkin said, "If we want to balance the budget and move people from welfare to work, ensure the solvency of Social Security and Medicare, then we need a growing economy, not one held back by a Federal Reserve that sets policies more on unsubstantiated fears than on actual facts."

The other participants in the press conference also made sharply focused attacks on Greenspan. Reed said that Greenspan was "talking about an assessment of job security as one of the triggers for this preemptive strike. That to me seems to be an attempt really to be gambling with the fate of millions of working Americans." The inference, he said, "is that, in order to suppress inflation, the Fed is actually contemplating the idea of decreasing the job security of Americans."

Hinchey said that an interest rate increase would be wrong, because "it would do the opposite of what the Federal Reserve alleges it wants to do, and that is to stabilize economic growth and to have an economy that is growing. It would turn the economy in precisely the opposite direction."

### Another budget proposal is demanded from Clinton

On March 12, the Republican-controlled House passed a resolution demanding that President Clinton submit a second budget proposal, one that "balances" the budget by the year 2002. John E. Sununu (R-N.H.) said the resolution "calls quite simply for the President to work with this House toward a balanced budget agreement" that meets a specified set of criteria.

The resolution provided more fuel for the fire that the Democrats have been building for some time over the fiscal 1998 budget. Of late, Democrats have been focussing their attack on the failure of the Republican leadership in the Congress to move the budget process forward. John Spratt (D-S.C.) called the resolution a "red herring" and a "total waste of time."

House Democrats also picked up

on the warning by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) the week before. Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.) said that it was Republican intransigence in the 104th Congress over how to score various budget proposals that led to two government shutdowns. "Those costly government shutdowns were not simply the product of extremism. They were the product of this Congress messing around on resolutions like the one we have before us today."

Democrats pointed out that the law requires that a budget resolution has to be passed in both Houses by April 15, a deadline that will be missed by one to two months.

After about a half-hour of Democrats arguing in the same vein, Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) rather defensively came to the floor to say that the only issue is whether a budget agreement can be reached with the President, and failing that, "we will bring one forward that we will draft ourselves and that we will have an opportunity to consider in this House."

## **Barr wants to begin impeachment proceedings**

House Conservative Revolutionary Bob Barr (R-Ga.) has asked Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, to begin an impeachment inquiry against both President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, the March 14 *Washington Times* reported. Citing various allegations of fundraising abuses, Barr claims that "such a series of systematic abuses of the political process . . . points precisely toward theories of impeachment law invoked by this

committee nearly 25 years ago in the matter of President Nixon." Barr said that the appointment of an independent counsel is not "a desirable alternative."

However, Hyde told the Washington, D.C. broadcast "Fox News Sunday" on March 16, that Barr's call for impeachment was "a little bit of a stretch," and pointed to the fact that there were already four investigations under way of the Clinton administration. He added that he would want to see some evidence, "at least one smoking gun," before proceeding with impeachment. He called impeachment a "drastic, draconian remedy," and said, "I don't want to ever look as though we're politicizing these traumas that we're dealing with these days."

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) was, characteristically, more blunt, however. He said, on CBS's *Face the Nation*, that the idea of impeachment is "really a preposterous idea," and that "there are no facts to establish that there is any basis for an impeachment." Instead, he said, "what it really shows is the agenda that some Republicans have, and that's so partisan, it's so extreme." He added, "I just have to dismiss this idea that some Republicans have that they want to seek impeachment to try to get even for Watergate, but they don't have the basis for it."

## **Lake withdraws from CIA director nomination**

Anthony Lake, President Clinton's choice to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, withdrew his nomination on March 17, after he had spent three days testifying before the Senate Select Intelligence Commit-

tee. In a two-and-one-half-page letter to President Clinton, Lake called his nomination a "political football in a game with constantly moving goalposts."

Lake also characterized the hearings as "nasty and brutish," a description echoed by Democrats on the panel. Bob Graham (D-Fla.), during the second day of hearings on March 13, said that the first test of the committee "was whether we could conduct a bipartisan, rational hearing on the qualifications of this nominee. . . . I'm afraid that we are not distinguishing ourselves on that first test."

A fight then broke out between Graham and committee chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) over scheduling, and whether everybody would have enough time to ask their questions. Committee Vice Chairman Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) criticized the repetitive nature of some of the questioning, saying, "At some point, the ground gets plowed to an extent that you've got a sufficient amount of information and [can] make a decision about whether or not you're going to vote to confirm."

Otherwise, scandal and policy disagreements seemed to characterize most of the Republican line of questioning, whereas Democrats were more interested in Lake's views on the future of the Central Intelligence Agency.

After Lake withdrew his nomination, Shelby, appearing on ABC's *Good Morning America* on March 18, denied that he was out "to get" Lake. "There were a lot of questions about his management skills, and then, over the weekend, some other questions arose from it." Shelby claimed that what Lake was subjected to was just "part of a rigorous examination for a very tough job."