

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Caution urged against bashing Indonesia

On May 7, in hearings to review Clinton administration policy toward Indonesia, House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Chairman Doug Bereuter (R-Neb.) cautioned against judging Indonesia's relationship with the United States on the basis of news reports about what some Indonesians may or may not have done with respect to the 1996 U.S. election. It is "essential that we not demonize Indonesia in spite of the activities of the Lippo group. We should not attack the government for illegal acts by some of its citizens," he said.

The Republican membership of the subcommittee is dominated by Conservative Revolution proponents, but none of them were present.

The testimony of the principal witness, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Aurelia Brazeal, and the discussion that followed, were dominated by human rights issues, including East Timor, and the upcoming parliamentary elections in Indonesia. Bereuter usefully pointed out that Portugal "was a very neglectful colonial power when it came to its colonies, and the most neglected of all was, of course, East Timor. And when they left, they left it with no infrastructure, they left it in worse condition than any other colony throughout the world." Bereuter then asked Brazeal if the Portuguese were trying to use their influence in the European Union to force the issue of East Timor. Brazeal refused to commit herself, saying only that "it's difficult to characterize what the Portuguese have in mind."

Another note of caution was sounded by Matthew G. Martinez (D-Calif.), who said that reading the reports about riots in Indonesia last year, reminded him of what happened in Los

Angeles a few years ago. "It's not so unlike what happens in the United States, what happens in that country," he said. He pointed out that even in the United States, which is supposedly a mature democracy, there are problems with people being denied voting rights because of their ethnicity and so forth. He concluded, "I wish we were more tolerant of slower developing democracies than our own, and understood the problems that they have in those countries and base our foreign policy on that."

### Louisiana election under Senate probe

On May 8, Senate Rules and Administration Committee Chairman John Warner (R-Va.) announced that his committee's investigation of the contested Louisiana election, in which Democrat May Landrieu beat Republican Woody Jenkins by 5,788 votes, was about to begin. This follows a process of evaluation of charges and hearings that has often been accompanied by partisan fireworks.

Warner reviewed that process in his remarks on the Senate floor, briefly describing the basis for, and the bipartisan nature of, the investigation. He said that his one goal is "to see that my work is performed in keeping with the tradition of the Senate in past cases, and to give the full committee my honest judgment of these facts . . . respecting the Senate's duty" under the Constitution. He promised that his committee's investigation will "determine the existence or absence of that body of credible fact that would justify the Senate in making a determination that fraud or irregularities or other errors did or did not affect the outcome" of the 1996

Senate election in Louisiana.

Meanwhile, on the House side, the House Oversight Committee's investigation of the election in California's 46th district, in which Democrat Loretta Sanchez defeated nine-term Republican Bob Dornan by less than 1,000 votes, is bogged down over whether Dornan has subpoena power in his quest to overturn the election results.

### Juvenile crime bill would bring in the feds

On May 8, the House passed a juvenile crime bill by a vote of 286-132. The bill, part of the "Contract on America," and sponsored by Bill McCollum (R-Fla.), requires the Department of Justice to become involved in juvenile justice, heretofore a function handled at the state level.

McCollum argued that an epidemic of violent crime committed by teenagers under 18 is just around the corner, and that "the juvenile justice system is unprepared for this coming storm." He said that "Congress needs to provide incentives to the states to stimulate a core of critically and urgently needed repairs of the juvenile justice system."

The bill provides \$1.5 billion in Federal grants to states to expand their juvenile justice systems, but on condition that they meet four requirements, which involve sanctions for delinquent acts, trying juveniles as adults for certain violent crimes, establishing record-keeping systems, and holding parents accountable for their responsibilities under court-ordered sanctions of their children. The bill also establishes a Federal system of juvenile justice.

Opponents of the bill argued that

it didn't deal with the issue of prevention. Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Tex.) said, "This legislation will not make us safer, but only divert attention from real and more difficult solutions." Mel Watt (D-N.C.) said, "Throughout our history, juvenile justice has been a matter of state and local law. Yet, my conservative Republican colleagues all of a sudden have decided that we are going to federalize juvenile justice in this country. We do not even do a good job of criminal justice for adults, yet we are going to federalize and tell the states what they are going to do in the arena of juvenile justice."

## Gingrich, McCain back MFN for China

Despite the negative press against China these days, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) have come out for renewing Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status with China.

In a speech on May 8 before the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, McCain stated that the "allegations of money from China into the U.S. elections will make up an unfortunate part of our discussions of MFN in the Senate soon." He said that he did "not think U.S. policy was affected by these contributions," and that he is worried about how we treat "this emerging world power." He argued against isolating China by pointing to the U.S. policy of isolating Germany and Japan when they were emerging world powers earlier in this century. That, he said, led to World Wars I and II. "There is nothing that I have seen that indicates us getting into some kind of confrontation" with China, he said.

Appearing on NBC's Meet the

Press on May 11, Gingrich listed a number of proposals before the Congress to deal with the China MFN issue in the context of the July 1 reversion of Hongkong to China. He said that he was disappointed that President Clinton has threatened to veto any proposal that would delay MFN on the basis of what happens in Hongkong. "I think that's the wrong signal to China," he said.

However, Gingrich added that he was in favor of renewing MFN. "We want China to be able to trade with the United States," he said. "I believe American companies in China are a step for democracy." He said he didn't think that the charges of Chinese attempts to influence the U.S. election would affect the vote on MFN; however, "it is certainly a weaker vote today than it was a year ago, and people are very concerned about the early indications in Hongkong."

## Budget deal comes under pressure

The much-touted budget agreement reached on May 2 between the Clinton administration and Congressional Republicans looked increasingly iffy, as details began to be discussed. The challenges to the agreement came from all parts of the political spectrum.

On May 5, Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), in remarks on the Senate floor, pointed to the benefits of the tax cuts for the wealthiest segment of the population and asked, "Where is the soul of our party that has a reputation for being willing to fight for the ordinary people, being willing to fight for working people and working families?"

On May 8, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) accused Republicans of trying to change the

agreement with respect to the consumer price index and restoring funds to education and other areas.

At the same time, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster (R-Penn.), in a letter to the House Republican leadership, blasted the agreement for not allowing sufficient funding for highway construction. Shuster charged that the agreement provides for \$15 billion less in highway spending than will be available in the transportation trust funds, "thereby continuing the *dishonest* practice" of using the trust funds as a bookkeeping trick to help bring the Federal budget into balance, a practice that Shuster has been arguing against for years.

On May 9, Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), in an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, attacked the economic assumptions on which the agreement was based, and complained that the Conservative Revolution had sold out because the agreement spends \$216 billion more on domestic programs than was contained in the Contract with America.

The leadership of both parties claimed that there is plenty of support for the agreement. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), on May 7, acknowledged that there were some within the Democratic caucus opposed to the agreement, but he insisted that "the level of support in the caucus is very, very significant." Two days later, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) acknowledged that "some areas of uncertainty or confusion" exist within the Republican caucus on the budget deal, but when he was asked if it was "blowing up," he said, "There have been problems on both sides with misunderstandings," but "it makes no sense at all, at the beginning of the process, to say, 'Jeez, it's off.'"