

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### House Ethics Process Remains Stalled

A dispute over hiring of staff for the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, also known as the Ethics Committee, has kept the committee in limbo ever since the House GOP leadership backed down on ethics rules changes earlier this year. Committee chairman Doc Hastings (R-Ga.) fired the nonpartisan chief of staff and replaced him with one of his own staffers, when he took over the committee, an action that Democrats believe is a violation of House rules. The result has been another standoff between Hastings and committee Democrats, led by ranking Democrat Allan Mollohan (W.Va.), that has prevented any action by the committee to take up pending investigations.

On June 9, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) offered a privileged resolution which would have required the committee to hire nonpartisan professional staff, subject to a majority vote of the committee's members. The House tabled the resolution by a 219 to 199 vote on a motion by Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), which prevented any debate. During a colloquy between Blunt and Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (Md.), Blunt would only say that he was disappointed that the Ethics Committee was still not functioning and that he thought the Republicans were doing everything they could to get it going again.

Pelosi, speaking to reporters later in the afternoon, charged the GOP with refusing to obey House rules which require the appointing of nonpartisan professional staff for the committee. "So, this is something that the Republicans are either going to obey the rules, or they are not, but we are not going to say we will ignore the rules of the House so that you can appoint a partisan political person to lead the in-

vestigation of members of Congress." She noted that half the first session of the current Congress has already passed by without any action by the committee. "It's abuse of power," she said. "It is saying that they are above the law and it is a scandal."

The first item of business the Committee is slated to take up, once it starts functioning again, is the question of the ethics violations of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.).

### GOP split on Holding Prisoners at Guantanamo

Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) triggered an uproar on June 12, when he told CNN's John King that the U.S. government cannot continue to hold prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, indefinitely, without some sort of due process. Secondly, he said, "we need to make sure that whatever we do is in some confluence with and association with the other nations of the world," including international treaties and other agreements. "It may well be to close Guantanamo Bay if we have an alternative, would be the best thing for all of us," he said. He also ridiculed the notion that the torture alleged at Guantanamo and at Abu Ghraib in Iraq was the responsibility of a handful of low-ranking reservists. "I was in Vietnam in 1968," Hagel said. "I carried a rifle. I saw a culture develop that was a very bad culture, that ended in disaster for this country." He warned of a dangerous drift that is "going to end in disaster for this country" and "we're going to present to the world a very dangerous world if we don't wake up and smell the coffee, here."

The Bush Administration and its supporters in the Senate reacted with rage to any notion of closing Guantanamo. Vice President Dick Cheney told Fox News's Sean Hannity, on

June 14, that "there's no plan to close Gitmo" and that the prisoners there are "bad people." Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) said the exact same thing, and while acknowledging that the U.S. has an "image problem," said, "Let's not cut and run because of image problems."

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), standing next to Frist, had a slightly different approach, however. He did not suggest closing the prison, but said he thought the problem had "to do with the disposition of the people who are detained there. We need to bring charges against them if there are reasons to do so."

### Sensenbrenner Throws A Fit vs. Bush Critics

House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.) angrily shut down a hearing of the committee on June 10, after lecturing the witnesses about their testimony, in which they attacked Bush Administration policies at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, unlawful detentions of so-called "enemy combatants," and so forth. Sensenbrenner said that their only strategy was to oppose the USA Patriot Act by talking about everything except what is in it. "This hearing confirmed the fact that the Patriot Act is being used as the buzzword for people who have very broad-brush objections" to Bush Administration policies, he said.

Sensenbrenner gaveled the meeting to a close and walked out, even as Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) was making a point of order against Sensenbrenner. As Nadler began to speak, the microphones were shut off, but Nadler went on anyway, noting that Democrats have had no opportunity to speak on these Bush Administration policies because the Republican chairman has refused to hold any

oversight hearings. He said those who question the Administration's acts "are not besmirching the honor of the United States, but seeking to uphold it."

After Nadler spoke, Dr. James Zogby, president of the Arab-American Institute, and one of the witnesses, addressed the Democrats and audience remaining in the hearing room: "As we are lecturing foreign governments, I am really troubled by what kind of lesson this is going to teach to other countries in the world."

## House Panel Passes Defense Spending Bill

The Fiscal Year defense appropriations bill sailed out of the Appropriations Committee on June 7 with minimal controversy. The \$409 billion bill includes an advance \$45.3 billion in bridge funding towards an expected Fiscal 2006 war supplemental to cover the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bridge funding includes \$2.8 billion to replace equipment and ammunition, \$1.2 billion for body armor and other protective gear, \$230 million to cover enhanced insurance and death gratuity benefits.

Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), the ranking Democrat on the committee, made a point of the fact that the \$45 billion will only cover about half the expected cost of the war, given that Congress has appropriated \$100 billion for war costs for Fiscal 2005, already. He offered an amendment calling on the House Budget Committee to report a new budget resolution if the war costs wind up increasing the projected budget deficit. Otherwise, "the Budget Committee will have performed a six-month con job on us as a committee by pretending that we need \$45 billion less than what in the end we will actually need."

The committee defeated Obey's budget amendment by a voice vote, but accepted another one he offered expressing the sense of Congress that coercive religious proselytizing should not be tolerated at the U.S. Air Force Academy. "All I'm trying to do is put the Congress on record urging that we get to the bottom of what is happening at the Air Force Academy," he said, "because I, for one, don't intend to recommend the appointment of anybody to that academy until this has been cleared up. . . ."

## Senators Announce Manufacturing Caucus

On June 14, Senators Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) announced the formation of a Senate Manufacturing Caucus, to look into the reasons why 3 million manufacturing jobs have disappeared over the last three years, and to try to find solutions. "If we don't act decisively, and in a bipartisan way, we'll continue to lose manufacturing jobs that have been a real staple to the American economy," said Graham. He said the goal of the caucus is to "come up with creative solutions, realizing that globalization, the global economy, are part of the 21st Century." He said that the caucus will be looking at manufacturers that are successful, why jobs are being lost, how to deal with competition from China and India, what can be done at home to create jobs and improve the climate for manufacturing at home.

The way they plan to do this is by holding hearings around the country, not just on Capitol Hill, to hear from people "with all different perspectives to come and tell us what they need, what they want, what they believe will work for them," said Clinton. Other members of the caucus, of which Gra-

ham and Clinton will be co-chairs, include Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), Mark Dayton (D-Minn.), Mike DeWine (R-Ohio), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.), Tom Harkin (D-Ia.), Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Ben Nelson (D-Neb.), Barack Obama (D-Ill.), Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Arlen Specter (R-Penna.), and Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.).

## Dems Demand Support for Troops, Veterans

On June 7, Senate Democrats scored the GOP leadership for focussing on five judges while the Fiscal 2006 defense authorization bill languishes on the Senate calendar. "It's unfortunate," said Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), "because I believe it's time that Congress get its priorities straight and puts our troops ahead of politics." The Senate Armed Services Committee originally reported the bill on May 13, and there is still no indication of when it might come to the floor. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), the ranking Democrat on that committee, called the bill "vital" for military morale, adding that it is "unthinkable" that the Senate should delay its consideration.

Two days later, Reid and the Democrats announced legislation to expand the capacity of the Veterans Administration to provide mental health care. "Instead of saying that the fiscal situation is bleak," said Daniel Akaka (D-Hi.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, "we should be re-examining our priorities to ensure that our veterans get the care that they deserve and have earned."