
EDITORIALS



THE UNFINISHED CONGRESS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

The House of Representatives and the Senate are back in session after their month-long holiday. This unfortunate occurrence could not be prevented, as it is mandated by joint resolution of the Congress. On the other hand, were the lawmakers of the 101st Congress never to return, history could confer on it a memorable and significant title. Just as Franz Schubert's B Minor Symphony has been known to generations of music lovers as the "Unfinished Symphony," the 101st Congress could be known to students of American politics as the "Unfinished Congress"—and for good reason. Whether the lawmakers adjourn on time or not, you can be sure that they will leave with their business unfinished.

After all, it has been years since a Congress finished its business. The main business of Congress is to pass a budget that funds the government. Since the 1974 Budget Act, the Congress has not passed a budget on time and usually managed to keep the government going only through a series of blowsy continuing resolutions. In fact, since 1969 it has not even balanced a budget. Now, as the distinguished public servants fly back into Washington, they all are vowing to slay that irksome budget deficit. They will not finish this business and they will not accomplish much else.

Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Post column syndicated by King Features.

The fact is that the kind of people we elect to Congress all essentially see government from the same perspective. That is to say, they see government as a giant milch cow for feeding their hungry constituents. They do not see it as a potential danger to civil liberties, as did the Founding Fathers. In fact, as the political scientist James Q. Wilson has written, the modern congressman is a breed apart from the pre-New Deal congressman. The older variety arrived in Washington believing that there were things he could not do. The Constitution and good sense barred him from certain undertakings.

Today's lawmaker feels bound by no such restrictions. President George Bush, ever the good guy, has relaxed his strictures against raising taxes in the hope that the congressional Democrats will help him balance the budget by cutting spending. But the congressional Democrat is biologically incapable of cutting spending. Perhaps someday researchers scrutinizing the DNA structure of the common House Democrat will isolate a gene that inclines him toward spending public monies, much as researchers have found genes that incline individuals toward other forms of anti-social behavior. As for now, we can be sure that this Congress is not going to come up with the necessary budget cuts to achieve balance or make headway in cutting the deficit.

Whether we recognize it or not, this is going to be another Unfinished Congress. That is not wholly to be sniffed

at. Some of the bills that await the lawmakers' wizardry are best left unfinished. The so-called Civil Rights Bill might better be called the 1990 Lawyers' Employment Act. It will be a boon for ambulance-chasers, who will be able to drag even very small businesses into court to defend hiring practices. The Clean Air Bill will impose a cost on the economy ranging from \$35 billion to \$45 billion, with no proven benefit whatsoever to the environment.

As the lawmakers of the 101st Congress settle down to work, I find it very heartening to see that a growing number of my fellow Americans share my low opinion of our elected solons and numas. According to a *New York Times*/CBS poll, fully 42 percent believe that half or more of the mem-

bers of Congress are crooks. Sixteen percent even believe their own congressman is corrupt. Forty-four percent disapprove of how Congress works, and 46 percent believe that the standards of ethics have declined over the past decade. The best news is that 40 percent of us want to see a new person represent our district.

According to the *Economist* magazine, as many as a hundred senior members of the House are contemplating retirement in 1992 so that they can take off with their accumulated campaign contributions in the bank. Now that will be a spectacle of public-spiritedness worthy of Congress. I, for one, am willing to wait two years for it, assuming—in fact, hoping—that no significant business is transacted in the meantime. □

JESSE WHO?

It must give the Rev. Jesse Jackson a very creepy feeling to read the abundant speculation in the press that his days at center stage are ending. After all, it is the press that has made Jesse Jackson the figure that he is. Without headlines, who would know what he has done? And what has he done but attract headlines? That the headlines were few when he took off for the Middle East the other day cannot have allayed his creepy feelings. Without headlines Jesse Jackson does not exist.

He has never written any laws or contributed any memorable ideas to the public discourse. He has never written any books or even a speech that one can recall. For that matter he has not even written an enduring line, aside from some dithyramb about going from an outhouse to a courthouse, thence to . . . I think it was the White House; but by then the words did not matter. I was swaying madly and clapping my hands, and enjoying his show. He has been a swell entertainer, but what else? He has led no historic protests, fought no very well-defined battles, played no unique role. Absent

Jesse Jackson, another charlatan would pop up. P. T. Barnum recognized that decades ago, and my guess is that the Rev. Jackson recognizes precisely how fungible he is—hence that creepy feeling.

He is a showman with a splendid knack for attracting attention to himself. Yet until Saddam Hussein's aggression was met by American decisiveness, the Rev. Jackson's capacity to draw attention seemed to be fading. Black political leaders were multiplying, and they were real political leaders, with political offices, constitutional responsibilities, and supporters from all races. The Rev. Jackson's national campaign to drop the term black (adopted but a few years ago as a replacement for Negro) in favor of the hyphenated term African-American (a term very similar to one used several decades ago as a replacement for colored) certainly got him little attention. In fact, the only significant news stories on the Rev. Jackson have all contained bad news.

There was a *Wall Street Journal* story reporting that only the *Journal's* reporter bothered to attend a Jackson



press conference on the savings and loan mess. There was a *Washington Post* story analyzing the Rev. Jackson's complaints that "news media are ignoring his activities." And there was a brief news service report that the Rev's Rainbow Coalition Inc. is being sued in Washington, D.C. Superior Court by Tommy's Limousine Inc. in an attempt to collect \$14,586.36—the unpaid remnant of a \$22,317.73 bill rung up by the Rev. Jackson in the summer of 1989 when he used a limousine almost daily in pursuit of some arcane goal of his humanitarian hooey. Perhaps the Rev.

Jackson can transform that last item into good ink. Perhaps he will cite it as evidence of how he, a man of the people, is exploited by fat cat limousine operators. He has worked other such miracles in the media.

He has fraternized with America's enemies abroad. He has shaken down American businessmen for his various campaigns. He has uttered ethnic slurs that would send a lesser performer into lifetime retirement. He is a media marvel: a preacher with no church or congregation, a political leader who has held no office, and now he is a

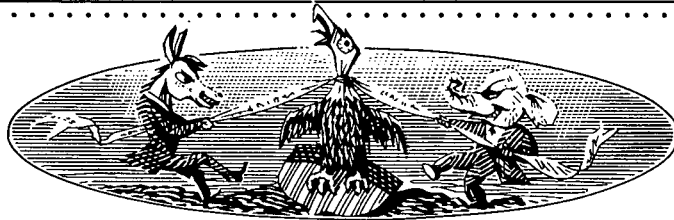
journalist, though he has no reportorial skills, no literary skills—no qualifications whatsoever to be considered a journalist.

Before heading off to interview Saddam Hussein he attempted to shake down news organizations for as much as half a million dollars to support this nonsensical foray into journalism. He settled for \$125,000. He is going to begin a talk show in the fall and that, he says, makes him a journalist. Well, then, maybe Johnny Carson and David Letterman should shove off for Baghdad and broadcast all the happy

thoughts of the amusing Mr. Hussein.

Only I doubt that Mr. Carson or Mr. Letterman would be welcome in Baghdad. The flickering career of the Rev. Jackson will now get a boost from another of America's enemies. Is it not curious how frequently America's enemies are instrumental in the Rev. Jackson's advancement? Without the press and without America's enemies, Jesse Jackson might have dropped from view long ago. If the press really has tired of him he may do so soon, and we shall have the opportunity to savor the fall of the national charlatan. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



A NEW WORLD STRUGGLING TO BE BORN

by Tom Bethell

As I write, the probability of war in the Middle East looks very high. Perhaps, in time-honored fashion, Saddam Hussein will be deposed by his own junior officers. But at this juncture it is difficult to visualize either side climbing down. What if we do go to war with Iraq? In the opinion of the more hawkish element among conservatives, such a war can be easily and swiftly won, so great is our technological advantage and so superior the training of our military. This may well be true. If by victory we mean simply the destruction of Iraq's military machine and its nuclear and chemical plants, victory can probably be easily achieved.

What is less clear is the way things will look on the day after the bombing raids. Richard Perle of the American Enterprise Institute, formerly an assistant secretary of defense, argues against those who worry that a U.S. attack on Iraq "would forever alienate the Arab world." To the contrary, he wrote recently, the Arab world is "far more likely to despise us for failing to destroy Saddam Hussein's military power." Perhaps it all depends on how you define the Arab world. If the phrase refers merely to heads of state, then Perle probably has a point. We do enjoy the support of a number of Arab rulers, some of them no less ruthless than Saddam Hussein himself; one or two of them would love to see their rival Hussein destroyed.

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To what extent the "Arab street" would rejoice at the bombing of Baghdad is another matter, of course. My own suspicion is that the festivities in Damascus and Cairo would last for no more than a few hours before the Arab world began to see the U.S. as rather more intrusive and threatening to its interests than Saddam Hussein ever was. But, as I say, war does look likely, so maybe we will have a chance to see who's right here. (A look at my earlier columns shows that I have been wrong in the past, e.g., criticizing an excessively amiable President Reagan for signing pointless arms control agreements, thereby signaling "weakness" to Gorbachev. Amiability worked, it now seems.)

On September 17, the Air Force chief of staff, General Michael J. Dugan, was fired for speaking out on the record about the probable course of U.S. military action against Iraq: "The cutting edge would be in downtown Baghdad," and so on. By all accounts, Gen. Dugan was fired for candor, not for making up his own policy. Of particular interest was the following comment, reported by the *Washington Post*. Having identified three "culturally very important" sites in Iraq—possibly religious centers—that American bombers would avoid, Dugan added: "We're not mad at the Iraqi people, and when this is all over we don't want the Iraqi people to be mad at us and the rest of

the allies we've brought together."

Are Americans naive or what? Comment in recent weeks really has been tinged with the suggestion that the Arab world will, on the whole, be grateful to the "international community" (that's us, folks) for punishing the aggressor, restoring the legitimate emir, and upholding the Wilsonian principles of stability, order, and the sanctity of national borders. Warning to American conservatives: they won't feel any such gratitude—even if we display cultural sensitivity and leave two or three of their more highly valued mosques unscathed. Sure, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia will heave a sigh of relief. And Hafez el Assad of Syria will be grateful if we finish off his enemy and rival. Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, having thrown in his lot with the Western powers, will, at least for a short time, feel reassured that he joined the winning side. But Mubarak is in power courtesy of the Egyptian army. How will the Egyptian people feel about bombing raids in Iraq?

The serene confidence of some conservatives has been nowhere more strikingly on display than in a series of *Wall Street Journal* editorials in August. Following a "short and decisive conquest of Iraq," the newspaper says, there would be a need for the permanent reform of Iraq's government, with the installation of "a new, moderate leadership" there. After the removal of Hussein, steps should be taken to ensure that "there are no further crises of this type in the Persian Gulf." (How

is such a grandiose goal to be achieved?)

To be sure, this will require "a permanent force of some power in the region." Which can be arranged: "Long after our troops come home, and we all hope it's soon," President Bush told Congress in September, "there will be a lasting role for the United States in assisting the nations of the Persian Gulf . . ." The newspaper seemed to be having second thoughts when it later suggested: "Iraq could be put under the suzerainty of an Arab leader the West and Iraqis trust." But the next day brought the following aperçu: "If we take Baghdad and install a MacArthur regency, that is the optimum." Any snags? Only minor ones. The usual foot-dragging has been detected on the other side of the Atlantic, where "messy things like wars are beneath the dignity of Europeans." On the plus side, though, Syria "will want to reconsider its position" as the player of hostage games, and Iran's Rafsanjani "will have a new reason to press for a rapprochement with the West."

I cut my ideological teeth on *Wall Street Journal* editorials, but I have to dissent from these hawkish views. The paper has long been an admirer of the carrot, but has lately emerged as even more respectful of the stick. Who knows, maybe time will prove them right. Maybe, by the time you read this, Iraq will have been pacified, the new MacArthur will be on his way to the smoldering ruins of Baghdad, and Iranians will be down on their knees, not worshipping Allah but quaking be-