

# EDITORIALS



## HEARING THINGS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Certainly it would be stirring to live in an era when giants strode through the halls of the Senate, but living as we do in a time when runts scamper about is not without its compensations. The senators' earnest strivings can be amusing. Is there one American in the land who did not get off at least one horse laugh while watching the grandiose idiocy of Senator Joseph Biden's clown show? The attendant television commentary was yet another occasion for laughter.

Alas, the Thomas hearings are behind us now. They have been consigned to history along with those other peculiar episodes of senatorial excess: the Watergate hearings, the Iran-contra hearings, the Bork hearings, and, more recently, the Tower hearings. What were they all really about? Were they about any epic alteration in public policy, say, the adoption of a Welfare State or socialized medicine? No, and as the historian Alonzo Hamby has written in his excellent history of the United States since FDR, *Liberalism and Its Challengers*, when Congress has made policy demarches of this sort in recent years, it has done so furtively, with as little public discussion as possible.

Well then, were these hearings held to decide matters of historic import? Slavery in the territories, the fate of the Union, participation in the League of Nations, neutrality? Of course not. Such debates were made memorable by stirring lines elicited by the gravity of the moment. One thinks of President Wilson, provoked by his senatorial opposition to proclaim, "A little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own, have rendered the great Government of the United States helpless and contemptible." Or of Daniel Webster standing beneath the same roof where Senator Biden has now so windily smirked and twittered. Responding to a perceived threat to the Union, Webster in 1830 declared, "When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last

time the sun in the heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union. . . . Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

There were no stirring lines from the senators during the Thomas hearings. Judge Thomas demonstrated appropriate dignity, but few of the senators even seemed aware of the imbecility into which they had dragged themselves. There should have been no hearings over Anita Hill's charges. They were defunct years ago. In fact, I am not sure that an adult American with a blameless record should ever be exposed to public inquiry over another person's unsubstantiated charges. Once again from the Senate, a band of willful men rendered the United States contemptible to the world. The row of grinning, scowling, and blank senatorial faces that was broadcast worldwide was an embarrassment—and did I detect during Miss Hill's lascivious testimony traces of lewd thoughts glistening in the eyes of one famous senator whose name I need not mention?



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

The real purpose of all the senatorial atrocities since Watergate has been nothing more elevated than the obstruction of a Republican President by a Democratic Senate. In some instances the obstructionists shamed only the President. In others they shamed the Senate. In this instance they shamed every branch of the federal government. What is to be done to end these mockeries of our system of government?

The solution is to end this condition of divided government by electing either a Democratic President or a Republican Senate in 1992. As the electorate obviously favors Republican presidential policies, and as the Democrats do not have any policies that they dare utter in public, this means a Republican Senate. The last time a Republican President had a Republican Senate was 1980-86, when the Republic enjoyed effective government, free of senatorial humiliations.

As soon as the Democrats regained control of the Senate the obstruction of the presidency began anew, with the Iran-contra hearings and the Bork spectacle. Now every time the President sends a nomination to the Senate he is in danger of having a third of his time diverted from running the government to merely staffing it. Think of the outlandish Tower hearings, the Gates hearings, and the utterly unnecessary brouhaha Senator Kennedy raised over a minor appointment for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In the coming election year the President should make an issue of this obstructionist Senate. He ought to remind the electorate of the declining standards of those senatorial rogues who have just made American government an international laughingstock. And he ought to ask voters for senators who will cooperate with him, rather than harass him. □

## STRANGE DEVICES

What passes for the Current Wisdom in the Democratic Party is now undergoing a subtle and unforeseen metamorphosis. Ever since the reign of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democratic Party has favored government action over laissez-faire. Now no less a Democratic eminence than Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell is telling us government policy does not matter.

President George Bush believes that America's Cold War foreign policy of Containment, fortified in the 1980s by the Reagan arms buildup, finally broke the resolve of Soviet Communism and led to a relaxation of hostilities between the Soviet Union and the West. Hence we can reduce our nuclear force and our strategic readiness. Senator Mitchell believes government policy has not mattered. A few weeks back, responding to the President's historic speech, Senator Mitchell asserted that the disarmament proceedings could have begun nine years ago when his fellow Democrat, Senator Albert Gore, presented a marvelously irenic disarmament proposal. Our recent foreign policy was unnecessary. Perhaps

Senator Mitchell will come out for a deficit reduction bill that simply shuts down the State Department and the Pentagon too.

Amongst the Republic's intelligentsia the fashionable explanation for the collapse of the Soviet Union is not that the American arms race bankrupted the Soviets but that they were undone by their system's own "internal contradictions." As Strobe Talbott, *Time* magazine's very *au courant* Sovietologist, said recently on the television show "Inside Washington": "The Cold War ended . . . because of internal contradictions and pressure within the Soviet Union. . . . And even if Jimmy Carter had been re-elected and been followed by Walter Mondale, something like what we have seen probably would have happened."

Unfortunately, Senator Mitchell's skepticism of government policy is not shared by all Democrats. There are still many, such as California congressman Henry Waxman, who believe government policy essential to human happiness. Congressman Waxman is now ushering through Congress a colossal pow-

er grab, felicitously named the "Food, Drug, Cosmetic, and Device Enforcement Amendments of 1991." I shall leave the Device Enforcement aspects of this matter for later discussion when children are not present. I am not certain what "devices" Congressman Waxman has in mind, but this is a disquieting term, especially in light of the power Congressman Waxman's bill would invest in his favorite governmental agency, the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

That agency now has more power to terrify the corner grocer or pharmacist than the Drug Enforcement Administra-

tion has to apprehend cocaine peddlers. What Congressman Waxman's bill will mean for entrepreneurs and consumers can only be imagined. Lawyers defending them will prosper handsomely; but the increased regulations will cost us all a bundle, and only God knows what this legislation will mean for "Device Enforcement."

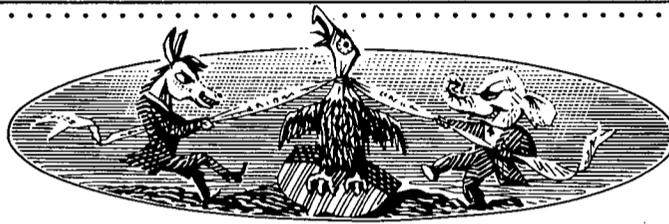
The act's very existence demonstrates the schizophrenia of the Democrats. At once they stand with Senator Mitchell and say presidential government does not matter. Then again they stand with Congressman Waxman and say the government will improve us. His act will

allow warrantless electronic surveillance of companies under the FDA's vast purview (which includes approximately 25 percent of the Gross National Product). All company records—including trade secrets and product formulations—would be exposed to FDA inspectors. The FDA would be able to recall products and embargo them for weeks without hearings or a right of appeal; and it would impose stupendous penalties. Over vast sectors of the American economy the FDA would be able to act as policeman and prosecutor, judge and jury.

This power grab is true folly. It invites

corruption, as all government regulations invite corruption—note the S&L scandals. It invites further politicization of the economy, for now interested groups can get their way not by competing in the marketplace but by bringing political pressure to bear on a government agency. Finally, the increased menace of lawsuits will stifle product innovation. Surely the world would be a safer place if the Democrats observed laissez-faire at home and allowed our government to wield power abroad. Recent experience proves as much, but then the Democrats have been remote from recent experience, haven't they? □

## CAPITOL IDEAS



### A CHAT WITH IRVING KRISTOL

by Tom Bethell

It was the day before Prof. Anita Hill's vindictive debut on Capitol Hill, and Irving Kristol was feeling depressed. Depressed? Normally he is the voice of optimism. "Depressed about Clarence Thomas, about Elliott Abrams, all the other things happening," he said. "Washington is a beautiful city, in the middle of which there is this cesspool called the United States Congress."

He was sitting in his "afternoon" office at the American Enterprise Institute, where he has long been a Distinguished Fellow. Recently he had been selected to receive the Institute's Francis Boyer Award for 1991. He is also publisher of the *National Interest* and co-editor of the *Public Interest*, where he has a "morning" office. He has been called the godfather of neoconservatism, his articles in the *Wall Street Journal* having been particularly influential. His hallmark is a relaxed, lucid style—the commonsensical voice of one who refuses to be impressed by experts. For years he was a professor of "social thought" at New York University, without having gone to graduate school. His son, William Kristol, is the chief of staff to Vice President Dan Quayle, and his wife, Gertrude Himmelfarb, is an eminent historian. He moved to Washington from New York four years ago.

What could be done about the nation's capital? "Term limitations are a

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way of flushing out the filthy water and flushing in some fresh water," he said. "You also flush out some good things, but that's the price you have to be prepared to pay." He said that President Bush was permitting the Vice President to "run with" the issue, but he wished Bush himself would do so. Senior Republicans in Congress (ever willing to enjoy the perquisites of office and cede policy to the Democrats) are opposed to term limits. "It is the most popular issue in the United States today," Kristol said. "By far. And could make a very big difference. I'd love to hear the Democrats oppose it."

Kristol had found persuasive a recent book arguing that the Republicans recruit people "who don't believe in big government and therefore do not make good politicians." Implying, of course, that big government is popular and here to stay. Jack Kemp, secretary of HUD, has said much the same thing: Why should Republicans let Democrats outbid them in the compassion-stakes? Politics will always prevent spending reductions anyway. Calling for an increase in social security payments in 1987, Kristol deplored the Republicans' tendency to "deny themselves any interesting initiatives in social policy, because such initiatives always cost some money." The Reagan Administration, he added, had "mindlessly submitted to the tyranny of the budget."

Political discussions with Kristol have

a way of turning swiftly from the ideal to the feasible. Pragmatism prevails over ideology. One wonders: Is he not rather too comfortable with big government?

"Give me something you would do to reduce it."

How about getting the government out of education? Socialism has failed in every other field.

"Federal government, I assume?"

Why not the states as well?

"Come on," he said. You have to go back "prior to about 1835" to find a precedent for that. "It's a little ridiculous to say that the last 150 years have been one vast error." You can say that sort of thing as an intellectual exercise, "but not if you want to be taken seriously politically."

How about John Stuart Mill's belief that those on "parish relief" (welfare) shouldn't be allowed to vote?

"Oh, that doesn't matter really, in our society. The number of people on welfare who vote is so trivial that it's of no significance."

Kristol did much to disseminate supply-side economics in the late 1970s—a triumph of political advocacy. Tax rate reductions were urged (the Laffer Curve first appeared in print in the *Public Interest*), and a few years later implemented. The economy blossomed. And notice: government revenues increased markedly, as promised by Laffer. Compromise was at the heart of supply-side theory: if the government permitted people to keep a greater percentage of what they earned at the margin, the gov-

ernment would reap greater revenues. All would therefore gain.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, a man of libertarian preferences, observed at the time that if it was true that a tax-rate reduction increased government revenue, the rate obviously hadn't been cut enough. Kristol, on the other hand, was undisturbed by the prospect of more revenue flowing into the Treasury. In fact, his neoconservatism has often seemed more a matter of the Democrats' moving left than his moving right—as he himself has often said. It speaks volumes about the leftist fanaticism to which we have all been subjected in recent years that the supply-side compromise was itself shrilly denounced as ideological extremism and ridiculed by journalists and Democrats. Kristol touched on this when I spoke to him.

"The Democratic party is falling apart," he said. "Which is lucky for us. It's completely out of sync with the public. What's happening to the Democratic party is the same as what has been happening to the Labour party in England. It's becoming more and more the captive of ideological groups who are very influential but do not constitute a majority. I do not see how that can change." He cited the feminists, who already were baying on behalf of Anita Hill—long before they could have known whether she was telling the truth. "And the media is populated by these same people, which gives them tremendous resonance," Kristol added. —