



# WASHINGTON NOTES ON AFRICA

Winter 1994

**I**n many countries, an election victory of 50.47 percent, with only a 37 percent voter turnout, would be considered a narrow margin, not a mandate for radical change. But the U.S. electoral system transformed these results of the congressional races into disproportionate gains. The Republican bandwagon was off, with even the Democratic President scrambling to climb on board.

While budget cuts frame the day-to-day debate, the underlying issues are more fundamental. Key Republican leaders aim to entrench a narrow "survival of the fittest" ideology into legislative guidelines, making it difficult or impossible to respond to demands of peace, justice and human development either at home or abroad.

To the extent that they succeed, the U.S. government will enter the 21st century as the firm advocate of the interests of a smaller and smaller fraction of the world's population. For its part, Africa will be further marginalized.

## **The Congressional Context\***

The 1994 mid-term congressional election dealt the Democratic Party its most stunning defeat in four decades. The Republicans went from a 178-256 minority to a 231-203 majority in the House of Representatives; in the Senate from a 46-54 minority to a 53-47 majority.

Republicans picked up 11 governorships, giving them a total of 30 states, with 70 percent of the U.S. population. The GOP also controls half of the state legislatures, and has effectively broken more than a century of Democratic dominance in the South.

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\* Adapted with permission from Black Political Agenda, a quarterly newsletter on African-American Politics. The newsletter is available through Peacenet (write to [clusane@igc.apc.org](mailto:clusane@igc.apc.org)) or by subscription (BPA, Box 27481, Washington, DC 20038).

## *Election Sets Scene for Anti-African Agenda*

The election brings to power political forces firmly committed to eliminating Great Society programs and what remains of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. This will have profound consequences for African Americans, Latinos, organized labor, women's groups and other social movements committed to human rights and a more just social order.

New House leader Newt Gingrich is particularly blunt about the GOP's objective: to replace the welfare state with an "opportunity" state, meaning one with no responsibility for maintaining even a minimal level of social justice.

While little was said during the campaign about civil rights and voting rights, a great deal was done to undermine them. Republicans joined with disgruntled Democrats to bring suit against redistricting which benefitted minority candidates. The rhetoric of Gingrich and other Republican leaders clearly signalled their hostility to multicultural diversity.

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# Africa and the New Congress

The November 8 elections sent shock waves through Washington, among politicians and advocacy groups alike. Some comforted themselves with the partially true cliché that the newcomers would soon adjust to the need for compromise. But for most the realization sunk in that only sustained

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counterefforts could preserve even the current limited options for priorities off the dominant agenda. Adjusting to the new realities will take time. But those who do not adjust are likely to find themselves flattened by the steamroller before they know it.

Among those concerned for Africa, one response has been to seek a silver lining.

Perhaps the less attention advocates drew to Africa the better; maybe the conservatives would simply ignore the continent, and Africans could get on with solving their own problems. The catch is that Africa, like it or not, is profoundly affected by decisions made in Washington. A policy of malign neglect, while structural disparities continue to draw resources from the continent, can make it more and more difficult for African pro-democracy and pro-sustainable development groups to function.

The first challenge in Congress came in late November when the Republican Caucus proposed to merge the House Subcommittee on Africa with the Asia Subcommittee, as part of their campaign to downsize Congressional staff by 25 percent. WOA and other groups in the

Africa advocacy community argued that regardless of the political makeup of the subcommittee, it was critical to maintain a place in Congress where African issues were discussed. Following an aggressive lobbying effort, the subcommittee was maintained, with Cuban-American Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) as chair.

The Republicans, however, pushed through their plan to block Members of Congress from pooling portions of their budgets to fund offices such as the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). This did not save money, since the funds came from individual members' budgets. But it eliminated staff and offices, forcing caucuses to meet on an ad-hoc basis or set up private offices outside government facilities. The CBC has been a critically important bloc for African issues. While this will remain the case, the Republican takeover cost the CBC the leadership posts its members had gained. The need to reorganize poses additional challenges to its effectiveness.

Africa took a second blow in December when Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), new chair of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, distributed draft legislation calling for:

- ▶ abolishing the Agency for International Development;
- ▶ making the Peace Corp part of the State Department in order to make it more explicitly an instrument of U.S. foreign policy;
- ▶ removing the earmark for the Development Fund for Africa, requiring Africans to "compete with other countries" for foreign assistance; and
- ▶ abolishing the African Development Foundation (ADF).

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The ADF, currently modestly funded at less than \$17 million a year, is mandated to support small community-based development efforts. The Development Fund for Africa, at \$800 million a year, operates under legislative guidelines stressing sustainable development.

McConnell's proposal states that all aid should "promote free trade and open markets, and advance overall U.S. security interests." References to sustainable development or poverty alleviation are entirely eliminated. It would increase assistance to the Middle East and the former Soviet republics. As McConnell put it, however, "I have a hard time justifying expenditure in most of the African countries. I know they have enormous problems, but I have a hard time finding an American national interest."

McConnell's proposal caught most Republicans by surprise, kicking off discussions over jurisdiction. Traditionally the committee with jurisdiction over "authorizing" legislation, which is supposed to come before appropriations, is the Foreign Relations Committee.

Nevertheless, Congress has not passed an authorization bill on foreign aid since 1986, leaving it to year-by-year appropriations. Congressional staff say that despite anger over McConnell's lapse in protocol, content similar to his proposal is quite likely to be incorporated into other legislation.

As the battle on foreign aid heats up over the next few months, most congressional debate is likely to be between those totally opposed to aid and those who support aid explicitly seen as enhancing immediate opportunities for U.S. business. WOA and other Africa advocacy groups argue that needed reforms should move in the opposite direction: towards more accountable promotion of sustainable development, which can in turn pay off in long-term opportunities. The key challenge is to mobilize not just to preserve the dollars for Africa, but for continued reorientation of priorities towards human development. 🌍

**NOTE:** A more complete list of relevant committee information is scheduled for the next Washington Notes on Africa, once fuller details are available. In the meantime, a list of Africa Subcommittee members is available by email (send requests to [woa@igc.apc.org](mailto:woa@igc.apc.org)), or by mail (send a stamped self-addressed envelope to WOA). More frequent updates and alerts are also available by email (send your email address to [woa@igc.apc.org](mailto:woa@igc.apc.org)).

## 104TH CONGRESS:

# Key Players on Africa

## Senate

**Nancy Landon Kassebaum** (R-KS), Chair,

African Affairs Subcommittee, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

First elected in 1978, Kassebaum is junior to fellow Kansas senator Bob Dole, the Majority Leader. Known as a moderate and independent-minded Republican, she was chair of the Africa Subcommittee from 1981 to 1986. While she opposed comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, she nevertheless voted to override Reagan's veto of the 1986 sanctions act. She is critical of the hard-line hostility to foreign aid shown by Jesse Helm, the new chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. She is regarded by Africa analysts as knowledgeable, thoughtful and generally sympathetic to the Development Fund for Africa and sustainable development funding.

**Mitch McConnell** (R-KY), Chair,

Foreign Operations Subcommittee, Senate Appropriations Committee.

Elected in 1984, McConnell, the junior senator from Kentucky, is strongly partisan. He was previously perceived as a moderate on foreign policy, due to his history of support for sanctions against South Africa and for past foreign aid authorization bills. Analysts perceive his December call to cut foreign assistance and hard line against aid to Africa as part of an effort to position himself in front of the right-wing bandwagon in the Republican party.

**Chair**, International Finance and Monetary Policy Subcommittee, Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.

As of January 26 the Senate had not yet named the chair or members of this subcommittee. It will have primary jurisdiction over policies guiding U.S. relations with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

## House of Representatives

**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL), Chair,

Africa Subcommittee, International Relations Committee.

In 1989 Havana-born Ros-Lehtinen, of Miami, became the first Cuban-American elected to Congress. She has been a strong advocate of anti-Castro policies. In particular, she joined with Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) in initiating the Cuban Democracy Act which tightened the embargo against Cuba in 1992.

**Sonny Callahan** (R-AL), Chair,

Foreign Operations Subcommittee, Appropriations Committee

Elected in 1984, Callahan is known as a pro-business Republican who is primarily focused on meeting the needs of his district (Mobile and surrounding area). He is also an opponent of Democratic fiscal policies and strongly hostile to foreign aid.

**Michael N. Castle** (R-DE), Chair, Domestic and

International Monetary Policy, Banking and Financial Services Committee.

A former governor of Delaware, Castle was elected to the House of Representatives in 1992. He is a moderate Republican with a history of a cooperative posture towards the current administration. The banking committee is of particular concern to Delaware, which provides the legal headquarters for about half the Fortune-500 corporations.

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# Anti-African Agenda

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Among White voters, 58 percent supported Republican congressional candidates, while 88 percent of Black and 70 percent of Latino voters backed Democrats. One would be hard pressed to name a single Republican candidate who fashioned an explicit multiracial message, talked

about overcoming contemporary racial inequality, or proposed a meaningful urban policy.

Tragically, most white Democratic candidates followed their example. While failing to earn greater white support, this flawed tactic helped depress African American and Latino turnout.

Low turnout, particularly among urban, low-income, and racial

minority voters, was a strategic asset for the Republicans. Voters and non-voters alike passed harsh judgment on Democratic leadership, either by supporting Republicans or by failing to turn out for Democrats.

Since the election the new leadership has launched a political blitzkrieg to ensure that to the victors go the spoils. House Speaker Gingrich has handpicked ideologically compatible colleagues as committee and subcommittee

chairs, and restructured the committee system in ways that could make him the most powerful Speaker this century.

Senate Republicans have also picked a right-wing leadership lineup. Sen. Bob Dole (R-KS) has become the Senate Majority Leader. Trent Lott (R-MS), to the political right of Dole, will be Assistant Majority Leader. Many Senate committees will be chaired by ideological soulmates of Gingrich, such as Helms (R-NC) at Foreign Relations, D'Amato (R-NY) at Banking and Urban Affairs, and Hatch (R-UT) at Judiciary.

Compromises will be made as the new Republicans find that they must. But with a weak response from the White House, much of the extremist agenda may be steamrolled into law. Even many of the 19 percent of eligible voters who pulled the lever for Republican candidates may be shocked at the results. In domestic terms, programs benefitting the poor will be among the first to fall. The Republican "contract" will also require massive curtailment in spending on public education, health care, mass transportation, infrastructure, research and development, environmental protection, and consumer safety. In the international arena, aid that benefits development and funds for international peace efforts are the first targets, with contrasting increases in spending for the military and narrowly defined trade promotion. 🌍

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