House Speaker Jim Wright: in his own defense

By House Speaker Jim Wright

Following are excerpts from the speech by House Speaker Jim Wright before the Democratic Caucus on April 18. The excerpts are reprinted here because readers have asked: What did he do to deserve such harsh treatment?

Congressman Wright used some of these same words in his resignation speech, Wednesday, May 31.

I'm going to give you a frank and forthright statement. I owe that to you. You are the one to whom I owe the most. You have given me the greatest gift within your power to give, and I owe you a standard of conduct and a standard of leadership of which you can be proud.

We have serious problems facing this country. We put together an active and enormously productive agenda in the last Congress. It was a great success. We've made a good beginning in this Congress. But let me make one thing clear: if circumstances of any type should ever make it impossible for me to be not only a respectable Speaker but a genuinely effective Speaker, then I would no longer want to be the Speaker...

It is significant that every one of the original charges brought by (Newt) Gingrich or by Common Cause has been investigated and formally dropped. They've been rejected. In their place are three other charges, pressed by the aggressive outside counsel, Mr. Phelan...

The Charges

The committee has voted, at Mr. Phelan's urging, that it found some "reason to believe" that rules may have been violated on three specific counts. The committee did not say there was proof that rules were broken, they did not say there was clear and convincing evidence that rules were broken....

There are three basic questions: (1) Was Betty's (his wife) employment a scheme, a subterfuge, and nothing but a 'gift'? (2) Did George Mallick have a "direct interest in influencing legislation" as defined under the rules? (3) Were sales of books of my authorship in bulk numbers to organizations and individuals, a violation of the House rules?

Betty Wright's job

The first question relates to the employment of my wife, Betty, by a small investment corporation named Mallightco, of which she and I owned 50 percent of the stock, and our friends, George and Marlene Mallick owned the other 50 percent. For a period of some four years, Betty was employed by this family corporation at a salary of $18,00 annually with attendant benefits.

George Mallick

The second alleged violation continues on the assumption that there were "gifts" from our friend and partner, George Mallick and further assumes that George Mallick had a "direct interest" in influencing legislation.

On Page 58 of the Committee Report it is suggested that simply because he was in the real estate business and had oil and gas investments, the Committee might "infer" that he "could be deemed" a person with a direct interest in legislation. The Committee suggests that he might have an interest in the tax code.

Well, I suppose every taxpayer does have an interest in the tax code. Everyone has an interest in the results of legislation. But that is not the question. The question is whether the person had a direct or special interest in trying to influence legislation.

The Committee does not suggest that George Mallick ever tried to influence me.

Book Royalties

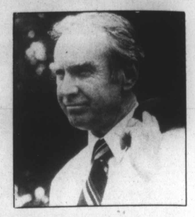
The only other question involved in the statement of alleged violation concerns the sale of a book, "Reflections of a Public Man", which I wrote and for which I received royalty payment amounting to $3.25 for each book that sold.

Interestingly enough the original complaints concerning the book were dropped. The new complaint injected by Mr. Phelan was the suggestion that some individual associated with groups to which I made speeches brought multiple copies of the book and distributed them among their members or among students or among others.

Conclusion

If I wanted to make a lot of money, I never would have come to Congress...

I've never done anything to dishonor you. And I never will.



HOUSE SPEAKER, JIM WRIGHT

OPINION:

Sadness of a House divided

By Rep. Kweisi Mfume

Jim Wright has resigned.

For the sake of his family and the House of Representatives he has acted sensitively and responsibly.

The protracted procedure for determing the guilt or innocence of Speaker Wright would have subjected all involved to a long and stressful experience.

Jim Wright's resignation, which spared his family and the House, is not however an admission of guilt.

Nevertheless, the circumstances that precipitated Wright's decisive action create as many problems for elected officials as were ladid to rest by his resignation.

The American judicial system has English Common Law as one of its foundations. One integral, vital and essential element of that, and our law, is the premise that the accused is innocent until proven guilty.

The labyrinthine procedure for determing guilt and innocence, coupled with the public's preception fueled by press leaks, made it virtually impossible for Jim Wright to fulfill his Congressional responsibilities.

American society has become increasingly more and more complicated.

In government, the vast sums of money, the potential for profit and the financial intricacies of the marketplace related to legislation have resulted in a written code of Ethics that reflects the confusion and ambiguity of this complication age.

Clearly, the need for a more comprehensive Code of Ethics is sorely needed.

Unfortunately, the flaws in the code created an air of conviction without guilt that has cost Jim Wright his seat.

His resignation makes the first time in American history that a Speaker of the House has been forced to flee the chamber because of intense heat of presumed guilt.

Jim Wright's resignation shows three major flaws in the code. First, its lengthy time-line for determining guilt or innocence preclude a fair trail.

Second, the Code is subject to wide interpretation making ambiguity more operative than adherence. And finally this Code fosters ethical McCarthyism.

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) engaged in character assassinations during the early 1950s accusing countless people of communist sympathies.

McCarthy earned himself the dubious distinction of a dictionary entry which reads: "McCarthyism - an attitude characterized by opposition involving personal attacks by means of widely publicized indiscriminate accusations especially on the basis of unsubstantiated charges."

The snail-paced investigation allowed the charges to be publicly debated long before Mr. Wright was able to publicly defend himself. All these flaws need to be addressed and incorporated into a new Code.

Democracy, Congress and the American people are not well served by such a Code. Leaks of investigations by either the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct or the Justice Department are themselves unethical.

Sadly, despite Speaker Wright's plea that the House stop its political cannibalism I feel that the future holds more bloodletting.

As during the Presidential campaign of 1988, Democrats are still defending themselves against an onslaught of McCarthyite accusations.

It appears that what Repubilicans, like Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-GA.) and Party Chairman, Lee Atwater could not accomplish at the polls they will attempt to take by any means necessary.

ACT-SO winners named for 1989

By Elner W. Prater

The Baltimore NAACP ACT-SO committee, chaired by Mrs. Dolores B. Pierre, held the 1989 awards ceremony at the NAACP National Headquarters on Thursday, May 11.

The program was the culmination of months of work by 51 of the area's gifted and talented senior high students.

The youths had worked with volunteer coaches, school staff, and private tutors to perfect their talent for presentation on the day of competitions which were held in April at Belmont Elementary School.

On the day of the competitions, over 36 community leaders with expertise in the sciences, arts (visual and performing), and humanities served as volunteer judges.

They evaluated the youths who participated in 16 of the 22 nationally established categories. As a result of their efforts, eight first place winners were chosen this year.

These winners will go on to the national competitions to be held in Detroit, Michigan during the NAACP National Convention in July.

This year's winners are: Sharon Thomas, Polytechnic Institute, original essay; Ureka Gordon, Lake Clifton's Eastern, poetry; Kimberly Warden, McDonogh, oratory; Askie Swift, School for the Arts, dance; Shawn C. Peterson, Friends School, instrumental classical music; Camara Kambon, St. Paul School for Boys, instrumental contemporary music and music composition; Russell Harris, Southern, drawing; and Leonard Evans, School for the Arts, painting.

At the May 11 ceremony, parents, friends, and ACT-SO committee members were treated to sampling of the talent displayed at Belmont Elementary School.

Performing were: Walter Slowe, III from Forest Park and a past ACT-SO finalist; Hallie Brown, Western, soloist;

Stacey Wood, Dunbar, poet; Shawn Peterson, Friends School, a pianist;

Aliceson King, McDonogh, a violinist; Esther Chance, Southwestern, orator.

All participants received certificates for participation.

The first, second, and third place winners in each category, in addition, were awarded a gold, silver, and bronze medal, respectively.

Dr. Gwendolyn Cook, principal of Lemmel Middle School, was this year's presentor. Congressman Kweisi Mfume encouraged the gifted youths to "keep dreaming" and "keep studying."

Mrs. Pierre and other ACT-SO committee members will, now, begin preparing for the trip to Detroit.

The eight winners and several committee members as chaperones will spend the week in Detroit.

In Detroit, the eight youths will compete against the nation's black youth who are winners in their states for prizes and scholarships.

AIDS guide available

HHS Secretary Louis W. Sullivan, M.D. announced the release of a new Public Health Service publication designed to help parents and other adults — such as clergy, civic, and youth group leaders — talk with young people about how to prevent infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The "AIDS Prevention Guide" is the centerpiece of a new phase of PHS's "America Responds to AIDS" campaign that targets parents and youth.

"Many of us find it hard to talk openly with our children about drugs and sexual behavior — yet these are precisely the areas of behavior that put many young people at risk of HIV infection," Secretary Sullivan said. "I urge parents and other adults concerned for the health and well-being of youngsters to use this guide as an aid in giving young people the information they need to protect themselves."

The "AIDS Prevention Guide" — available free to adults who call the National AIDS Hotline (1-800-342-AIDS) — provides the facts about HIV infection and AIDS, and suggests techniques for delivering these facts effectively.

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International Page

Sullivan outlines U.S. position at WHO confab

HHS Secretary Louis W. Sullivan, M.D. led the United States delegation to the annual meeting of the World Health Organization in Geneva.

Addressing the World Health Assembly, Secretary Sullivan outlined U.S. progress toward the health targets laid out in the report, "1990 Health Objectives for the Nation."

He also reiterated U.S. support for WHO's objective, "Health for All by the Year 2000."

Dr. Sullivan also signed a renewed U.S.-Egypt Health Agreement with Egyptian Minister of Health Raghib Dewidar.

The agreement provides for continued cooperation in biomedical research, manpower development;

Also emergency medical services, health information systems, infectious and parasitic diseases, pharmaceuticals and food safety, and environmental and occupational health.

Addressing an attempt by the Palestine Liberation Organization to become a full member of the WHO, Dr. Sullivan said, "I believe it is very important that we keep the World Health Organization focused on the long list of health problems that need our attention.

"We should not be diverted by political issues." Action on PLO membership was deferred.

In his speech to the Assembly, Dr. Sullivan also said the U.S. "enthusiastically endorses the WHO's objective to eradicate polio from the world by the year 2000.

"As a member of the world community, the United States will continue to provide technical and financial assistance for the eradication effort . . . (and) I have directed the Centers for Disease Control to increase its technical support to the eradication program," Dr. Sullivan said.

The Secretary noted that the U.S. has expanded its collaborative efforts with the WHO and with several individual countries in combatting AIDS.

And he cited other collaborative efforts, including the recent U.S.-Soviet agreement to conduct a joint study on operating health services in emergencies caused by natural disasters, such as the recent earthquake in Armenia.

GENEVA—HHS Secretary Louis W. Sullivan, M.D., is greeted by Prof. D. Ngandu-Kabeya, Zaire State Commissioner of Public Health, the outgoing president of the World Health Assembly.

Ethiopian president names new staff

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — President Mengistu Haile Mariam has named 10 politicians and party loyalist to replace senior military commanders killed or arrested after last week's attempted coup against the Marxist government.

Many of those appointed had retired from the military more than a decade ago. Most were middle-level officers when they took part with Mengistu in the 1974-75 revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie and served on the military council, or Dergue, that governed immediately afterward.

Deputy Prime Minister Addis Tedla, an air force major before the revolution, was promoted to lieutenant-general and named commander-in-chief of the armed forces, according to a statement from the president's office late Tuesday which announced the 10 appointments.

Tedla replaces Maj.-Gen. Merid Negussie, a ringleader of the coup attempt who was killed in a May 16 gunfight at the Ministry of Defense between the coup plotters and loyalists led by the Presidential Guard.

No successor was named for Defense Minister Haile Giorgis Habte-Miriam, who was killed resisting the plotters, and there was speculation Mengistu might reserve that post for himself.

"Nine generals died in the revolt in the famine-stricken, east African nation and several more were arrested. Wednesday's issue of the bimonthly police gazette listed two other generals linked to the northern-based Second Army as missing and wanted by police.

Western diplomats based in Addis Ababa said Wednesday it was too early to predict how the appointments would affect Ethiopia's flagging war effort against rebel movements in two northern provinces, Tigray and Eritrea, where the revolt continued for two days after being crushed in the capital.

"Some of the appointments would appear to be political, but others are clearly military professionals," one diplomat said. He noted further appointments are expected, "and only when those come up will we be able to see the magnitude of the shake-up."

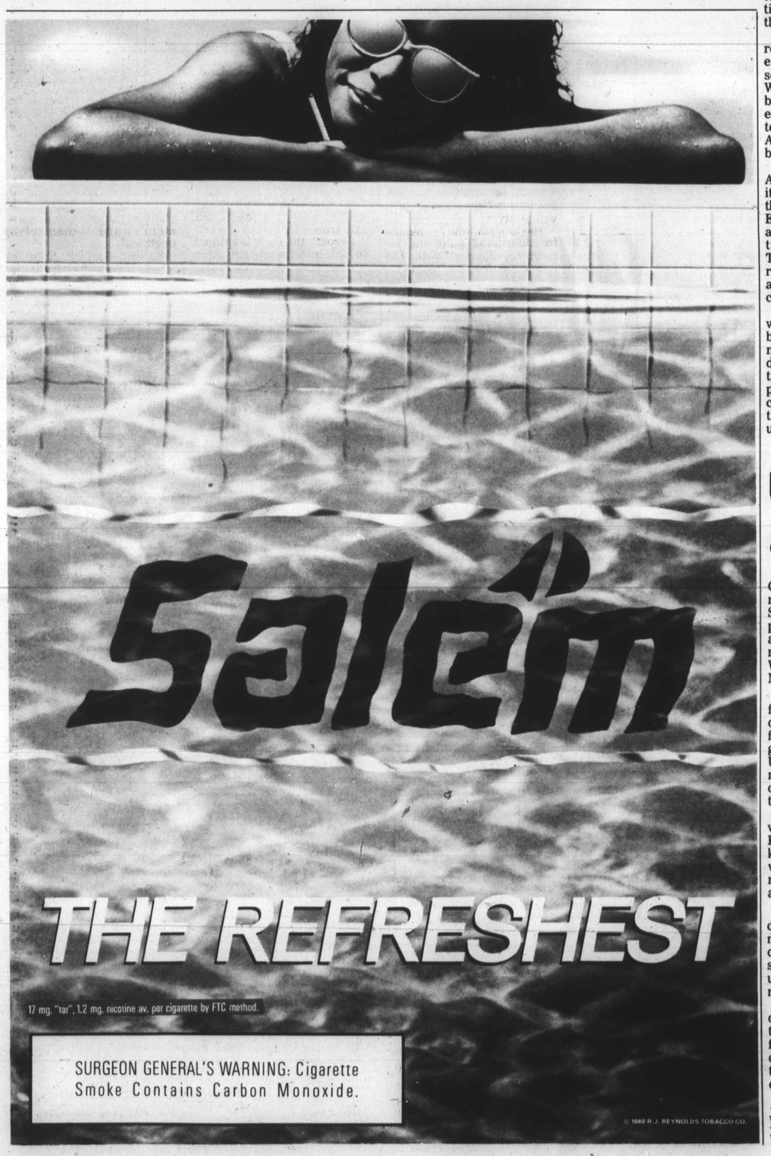
Among the appointments, Mengistu created two new posts of deputy chief of staff to back up armed forces commander Tedla. The two named were Maj.-Gen. Seyoum Mekonnen, head of the military affairs sector in the president's office, and Maj.-Gen. Mesfin Gebrekal, head of the political administration of the armed forces.

Air Force Commander Amaha Desta, a coup ringleader who was said to have committed suicide last week, was replaced by Brig.-Gen. Alemayehu Agonafir, deputy commissioner of the Defense Industry Commission. Agonafir was promoted to major-general.

Embibel Ayele, secretary of government council dealing with policy, was named commander of ground forces with the rank of major-general to replace Hailu-Gebre-Mikael, believed to be under arrest.

Command of the navy went to Yehualashet Girma, first secretary of the governing party in the capital, Girma, a naval lieutenant-commander at the time of the revolution, was promoted to rear admiral and replaces Tesfaye Berhanu, also believed to be under arrest.

The appointments also included Maj.-Gen. Wubishet Dessie, given command of the Second Army based in the Eritrean capital of Asmera where the previous commander, Demissie Bulto, was killed by his own troops for supporting the military revolt. — (UPI)



UN relief convoy ambushed in Sudan

NAIROBI, Kenya — Gunmen ambushed a U.S. relief convoy in southern Sudan with rifles and explosives, destroying one truck and killing three civilian relief workers, officials of the World Food Program said Monday.

The attack Sunday was the fourth armed assault and second fatal attack on convoys ferrying emergency food goods into Sudan since the United Nations launched its massive Operation Lifeline operation for the famine-threatened region on April 1.

Diane Weathers, spokeswoman for the World Food Program, said she did not know the nationality of the victims but said no U.N. staff members were hurt in the attack.

Weathers said the 20-truck convoy was making its way north from Kaya on the Uganda border to the town of Yei in southern Sudan when it came under attack about 20 miles north of the border.

"One truck was completely destroyed by a land mine and the convoy was also under fire," Weathers said. "According to most recent reports, three civilians were killed and one was seriously injured."

The convoy continued its journey and arrived in Yei on Monday, she said. Other convoys scheduled to travel over the route have been postponed because of the incident.

Weathers said only sketchy details of the attack had been received by two-way radio from field workers in Yei.

There was no indication of the identity of the attackers, but two previous attacks on truck convoys were blamed on ill-disciplined tribal militias who have been armed by the government to help in its civil war against guerrillas of the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

Eight rebel escorts were killed April 18 in the first such attack on trucks moving north from Kenya carrying food to the southeastern city of Torit. A second convoy was fired upon on the same route 10 days later but no one was hurt in that attack.

On May 21, about 100 gunmen halted a U.N. relief train carrying food from northern Sudan to the southwestern town of Aweil. They kidnapped U.N. official Brian Wannop and two French relief officials for several hours, robbing them of personal effects before letting them go.

U.N. officials estimate 250,000 people starved to death in southern Sudan last year because of the 6-year-old civil and fear another 100,000 could die this year unless the relief effort is successful. — (UPI)