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C-Span  
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*opinion*

Greetings:

It would seem that some of the commentators on C-Span ought to have tumbled by this time to the fact that President Clinton is well on the way to subverting the legislative process. It is the responsibility of journalists and political scientists to point this out so that voters can put a stop to it.

On the Crime Bill, it is transparently apparent that the President gave instructions to his Congressional Leaders to get a bill, any bill, through each house. Those two bills were sent to the Resolution Committee where they were, in effect, discarded and the Clinton Crime bill was substituted. The committee bill was then sent back to the House where it was to be voted on without amendment, i. e. up or down. This was the procedure adopted for last year's Budget bill and for the NAFTA agreement. (As Senator Mitchel so carefully explained, this is the traditional procedure)

The problem is that Clinton takes little or no account of what the House and the Senate have previously voted. The Resolution Committee bill omitted items that were part of the bills passed in the House and in the Senate and included items which had been omitted by one house or the other, or even voted down in one or both houses of Congress. For example, the use of racial numbers in determining discrimination in the death penalty, the assault weapons ban, the "prevention" proposals are all items for which support and opposition are easily mobilized. They clearly should have been omitted from any serious attempt at compromise. Nevertheless, by mounting a crescendo of public relations the President stampeded Congress into passing "his" bill. First the House and then the Senate attempted to balk, not the leadership, which had packed the Resolution committee to do the President's bidding but the newer members and the members whose constituents were holding their feet to the fire in favor or in opposition to specific provisions. That is why the leadership put a bill to a vote which they were careful to insure the members had no chance to study before they were required to vote. The theory was that the members could excuse themselves by showing that they cast the proper votes in the preliminary skirmishing but were unable to follow through at the end without endangering the President's whole program.

This cynical process worked. In fact, it began about the time that the Congressional leadership sandbagged President Bush on his infamous tax increase. It may have happened before in a less conspicuous manner. This time it trod on the sensitivities of too many Senators and Congressmen. The House of Representatives attempted to vote a new declaration of independence. They didn't vote against a crime bill, they just voted against being forced to vote on a conference report they hadn't seen and couldn't amend even if they had seen it. It apparently was printed before it had been acted on by the Joint Committee and not distributed until just before a vote was called for.



The Senate tried and also failed to assert its independence. I do not understand why CNN and C-Span had no one on their programs who could figure this out. One vote on the budget, one on NAFTA and now one on the Crime Bill and soon there will be one vote on the Clinton Health Reform Bill. Some one had better awaken to the fact that this country cannot be, or at least should not be, governed by one vote margins on laws containing provisions that have been defeated in one or both houses or, in some instances, have never been voted on in either house.

When neither lawmakers nor journalists can tell whether a conference report contains a specific provision, how are the people who call or write their congressman supposed to be able to tell them what they want? How many crimes have been committed by the weapons in the assault weapons ban? The Wall St Journal asserts that someone went through a gun catalogue and chose the weapons they felt appeared most threatening. Assertedly, allowable weapons can incorporate either a grenade launcher or a bayonet lug, but not both or they would be banned. If such a ridiculous standard is in the bill the "gun nuts" are outnumbered by the "gun idiots."

I own two rifles, a shotgun and a revolver. None are semi-automatic as I have never felt the need for that feature. My wife, my daughter and my two sons have been accustomed to using these weapons. I am glad of this because there is a rabies epidemic among the local raccoons. The police have declined to respond to requests to shoot those we have seen acting suspiciously so we have had to shoot them ourselves. Some fifty years ago I qualified for an expert medal in shooting the Thompson submachine gun. There are probably fairly few of us around at this time. It is a dangerous weapon but not an easy one to use effectively. It is much easier to hit a target (a rabid raccoon or even a "gun idiot") with a muzzle loading rifle.

The police do not "prevent" crime nor "protect" us from it. They respond to complaints and investigate after evidence arises that a crime has been committed. The Simpson murder is a dramatic case in point. The police had all kinds of evidence that a crime was possible, or even probable, but they did not and could not act. Our criminal justice system only prevents the crimes that repeat offenders might commit if they weren't locked up and some criminals even then manage to commit crimes while in prison. The proponents of the Crime Prevention Bill have grossly deceived their constituents. The chief result of this Crime Prevention act will be to increase the number of acts defined as criminal and increase the number of offenses that our overloaded criminal justice system will be expected to handle. A fairer title would be the "Crime Multiplication Act of 1994."

I am a little puzzled about where to send this letter. It is really a protest against what I call "leggo" legislating. You assemble your "blocks" or blocs by granting favors to each, even incompatible favors. Then you allow a test vote. Then you chip off the opposing "blocks" with more favors. It is a measure of President Clinton's cynicism that he and his minions never buy more than one extra vote. A Congressman who seeks to take advantage must position himself as a "moderate" i.e. a switch hitter. This is a technique that must ultimately fail.