

Deputy Vice Foreign Minister Le Mai told me that the largest mistake Vietnam ever made was implementing a command economy. He said the laws of capitalism "just are," which I took to mean that they are the natural order of things. He said the private sector is recognized in the 1992 Constitution as equally important to the State and Collective sectors. He acknowledged that private ownership of land has not yet been recognized and that this creates an incentive problem, especially in agriculture. Mai said that Vietnam was moving slowly in this sector to avoid the chaos it believes came to Eastern Europe after private ownership of land was allowed.

While Vietnamese officials repeatedly stressed their desire for increased foreign investment to stimulate further economic development, several barriers exist for foreign companies trying to operate in Vietnam today. I benefited immensely from a lengthy meeting with American business representatives struggling to do business in Hanoi today. One of the problems they cited is the requirement for a license for every aspect of a company's operation. Licenses are narrowly drawn, limiting a company's activities. Such a system naturally lends itself to corruption. Many companies make use of middlemen to deal with these headaches and such services add appreciably to costs.

Another problem arises from the lack of private ownership of property. Without private ownership of real estate, businesses cannot mortgage their property to raise capital for further investment. Foreign investors also lack direct access to a distribution system and are forbidden from holding inventory.

The heart of the problem for foreign investment, however, is the lack of a rule of law. No one can count on the government to honor a contract and there is no recourse to objective arbitration. Again, this leads to corruption "from top to bottom" because officials may demand a bribe to live up to what they have already promised. One U.S. businessman referred to contracts as "water soluble glue." Unless or until government officials take significant steps toward creating a sound and transparent legal system, foreign investment will be hampered.

D. Relations with the U.S.

This visit was only my second to Vietnam and my first to Hanoi. My first trip was with Senator Mansfield in 1962 during the early stages of the war. What surprised me above all else was the friendliness of the people and their willingness, even eagerness to deal with Americans, even though it was only some 20 years ago that American bombs were raining down on their country. Other Americans I met there also noted their sense that the Vietnamese were eager for closer relations with the U.S., in spite of our two countries' recent history.

Vietnamese officials welcomed President Clinton's announcement, the week before I arrived, of his nomination of Congressman Douglas B. "Pete" Peterson to be Ambassador to Vietnam. They agreed that having a former prisoner of war as Ambassador symbolized the willingness of both countries to put the war behind them. They seemed to understand that the dynamics of U.S. electoral politics could delay his confirmation and actual posting to Hanoi.

All officials in Hanoi, both Vietnamese and U.S., went to great lengths to assure me that cooperation on the most contentious bilateral issue—POW/MIAs—was strong and productive. At a lunch at the Charge's residence, U.S. embassy officials were unanimous in their assessment of Vietnamese cooperation: it could not be better. The U.S. military official in charge of the issue in

Hanoi described how his team was able to investigate every lead they received, to go where ever they wanted and to view all documents they requested. He emphasized that there were no roadblocks from the Vietnamese. I am convinced that the government of Vietnam is being fully cooperative with the U.S. on the POW/MIA issue and that, while this cooperation must continue, the issue should not in any way hamper further development of the bilateral relationship.

Le Mai raised an interesting point with us. He said that his government had tried to cooperate whenever and wherever it could, but that he and his colleagues often felt U.S. demands were unrealistic. He pointed out that only weeks before we arrived a U.S. commercial aircraft had crashed in the Everglades in Florida. Despite knowing exactly when and where the plane went down, and using the best equipment and best trained people to recover the remains of passengers, the U.S. had yet to recover a single identifiable remain. Yet if the Vietnamese government cannot produce finding of a crash that may have occurred 25 years ago, in a broadly-identified area, then critics in the U.S. will accuse them of stonewalling.

In discussing regional security issues, officials emphasized their desire for peace and stability to foster an environment conducive to economic growth for all. Deputy Foreign Minister Le Mai emphasized the need to have a "balance" between the various powers in the region, such as the U.S. and China, and U.S. and Japan, or Japan and China. While Mai did not name China as a threat regional stability, in the context of a discussion of recent Chinese military aggression in the Spratly Islands and the Taiwan Strait, he suggested that if "any one country" tried to increase its power, Vietnam would be open to an increasing U.S. presence to preserve the balance.

Government officials went to great lengths to stress the importance of continuing the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. They also emphasized the "great potential" of improved economic ties. Specifically, Hanoi would like Washington to grant most-favored-nation (MFN) tariff treatment, Export-Import Bank financing, and Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) guarantees.

Perhaps the strongest argument for increased economic ties between the two countries came from U.S. business people living in Hanoi. They argued that through negotiating the trade agreement necessary to grant MFN and OPIC, Hanoi would be forced to address some of the more difficult problems facing U.S. investors, as described above. They further emphasized that by providing these trade preferences, the U.S. government would be helping U.S. businesses, not just the Vietnamese. Likewise, by denying them, the government hurts U.S. businesses and encourages the Vietnamese to shop elsewhere.

With both logic and passion, this business group argued that, despite the many structural problems they face daily in Vietnam and despite the fact that it is harder to do business there than in Russia or Mongolia, it was in both their personal interests and in our national interests to say. Over the next 20 years, Southeast Asia will be one of the fastest—and perhaps the fastest—growing regions in the world. Vietnam's geographic position makes it a natural hub for all types of trade and transportation. The question is not if Vietnam becomes another dynamic Asian market but when it does, will the U.S. be there? If our companies do not gain a presence there now, we risk losing market access later, possibly permanently. This is a problem the U.S. faces all over Asia where our experience and involvement is generally lacking.

This business group believes that Vietnamese leaders understand the problems in their legal system and are willing and able to correct them, albeit slowly. Vietnam's membership into ASEAN will help to guarantee the further development of a stable market attractive to even more foreign investment. American products, from consumer goods to elevators to computers, are popular in Vietnam. U.S. businesses have a tremendous advantage because the Vietnamese respect the quality of our products and would choose our companies if the financing were equal.

Finally, this group said that their working relationship with the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi could not have been better. In a centrally-planned economy, government-to-government relations are the only legitimate ones; these companies could not function without the Embassy. Even under these circumstances, they stressed that their relationship with the Embassy was better than in any other country they had worked. I, too, was very impressed with the Embassy staff, especially with Desaix Anderson, our Charge d'affaires there.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, September 25, the Federal debt stood at \$5,198,780,826,934.47.

One year ago, September 25, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,949,969,000,000.

Five years ago, September 25, 1991, the Federal debt stood at \$3,630,755,000,000.

Ten years ago, September 25, 1986, the Federal debt stood at \$2,109,249,000,000.

Fifteen years ago, September 25, 1981, the Federal debt stood at \$979,210,000,000. This reflects an increase of more than \$4 trillion (\$4,319,570,826,934.47) during the 15 years from 1981 to 1996.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 9:51 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, without amendment:

S. 1834. An act to reauthorize the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act of 1992, and for other purposes.

The message announced that the House has passed the following bills, each with an amendment, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

S. 868. An act to provide authority for leave transfer for Federal employees who are adversely affected by disasters or emergencies, and for other purposes.

S. 919. An act to modify and reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and for other purposes.

The message further announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1499. An act to improve the criminal law relating to fraud against consumers.

H.R. 3155. An act to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by designating the Wekiva River, Seminole Creek, and Rock Springs Run in the State of Florida for study and potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

H.R. 391. An act to amend the Solid Waste Disposal Act to require at least 85 percent of funds appropriated to the Environmental Protection Agency from the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Trust Fund to be distributed to States for cooperative agreements for undertaking corrective action and for enforcement of subtitle I of such Act.

H.R. 3568. An act to designate 51.7 miles of the Clarion River, located in Pennsylvania, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

H.R. 4036. An act to making certain provisions with respect to internationally recognized human rights, refugees, and foreign relations.

H.R. 4167. An act to provide for the safety of journeymen boxers, and for other purposes.

At 2:20 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Goetz, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3116) to amend title 18, United States Code, with respect to the crime of false statement in a Government matter, with an amendment.

The message also announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2092. An act to expedite State reviews of criminal records of applicants for private security officer employment, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3497. An act to expand the boundary of the Snoqualmie National Forest, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4137. An act to combat drug-facilitated crimes of violence, including sexual assaults.

The message further announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolutions, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 51. Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress concerning economic development, environmental improvement, and stability in the Baltic region.

H. Con. Res. 180. Concurrent resolution commending the members of the Armed Forces and civilian personnel of the Government who served the United States faithfully during the Cold War.

The message also announced that the House has passed the following bills, without amendment:

S. 1675. An act to provide for the nationwide tracking of convicted sexual predators, and for other purposes.

S. 1802. An act to direct the Secretary of the Interior to convey certain property containing a fish and wildlife facility to the State of Wyoming, and for other purposes.

S. 2101. An act to provide educational assistance to the dependents of Federal law enforcement officials who are killed or disabled in the performance of their duties.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

The message also announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bills:

S. 1834. An act to reauthorize the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act of 1992.

H.R. 1350. An act to amend the Merchant Marine Act, 1936 to revitalize the United States-flag merchant marine, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2366. An act to repeal an unnecessary medical device reporting requirement.

H.R. 2504. An act to designate the Federal building located at the corner of Patton Avenue and Otis Street, and the United States courthouse located on Otis Street, in Asheville, North Carolina, as the "Veatch-Bale Federal Complex".

H.R. 2685. An act to repeal the Medicare and Medicaid Coverage Data Bank.

H.R. 3056. An act to permit a county-operated health insurance organization to qualify as an organization exempt from certain requirements otherwise applicable to health insuring organizations under the Medicaid program notwithstanding that the organization enrolls Medicaid beneficiaries residing in another county.

H.R. 3186. An act to designate the Federal building located at 1655 Woodson Road in Overland, Missouri, as the "Sammy L. Davis Federal Building."

H.R. 3400. An act to designate the Federal building and United States courthouse to be constructed at a site on 18th Street between Dodge and Douglas Streets in Omaha, Nebraska, as the "Roman L. Hruska Federal Building and United States Courthouse."

H.R. 3710. An act to designate the United States courthouse under construction at 611 North Florida Avenue in Tampa, Florida, as the "Sam M. Gibbons United States Courthouse."

The enrolled bills were signed subsequently by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

At 5:13 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the bill (S. 640) to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

At 5:54 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, without amendment:

S. 1970. An act to amend the national Museum of the American Indian Act to make improvements in the Act, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House agrees to the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2660) to increase the amount authorized to be appropriated to the Department of the Interior for the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge.

The message further announced that the House agrees to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3068) to accept the request of the Prairie Island Indian Community to revoke their charter of incorporation issued under the Indian Reorganization Act.

The message also announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2505. An act to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to make certain clarifications to the land bank protection provisions, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2579. An act to establish the National Tourism Board and the National Tourism Or-

ganization to promote international travel and tourism to the United States.

H.R. 3700. An act to amend the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 to permit interactive computer services to provide their facilities free of charge to candidates for Federal offices for the purposes of disseminating campaign information and enhancing public debate.

H.R. 3804. An act to remove the restriction on the distribution of certain revenues from the Mineral Springs parcel to certain members of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

H.R. 3852. An act to prevent the illegal manufacturing and use of methamphetamine.

H.R. 3973. An act to provide for a study of the recommendations of the Joint Federal-State Commission on Policies and Programs Affecting Alaska Natives.

H.R. 4168. An act to amend the Helium Act to authorize the Secretary to enter into agreements with private parties for the recovery and disposal of helium on Federal lands, and for other purposes.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following measure was read the second time and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 4134. An act to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to authorize States to deny public education benefits to aliens not lawfully present in the United States who are not enrolled in public schools during the period beginning September 1, 1996, and ending July 1, 1997.

ENROLLED BILL PRESENTED

The Secretary of the Senate reported that on September 26, 1996 he had presented to the President of the United States, the following enrolled bill:

S. 1834. An act to reauthorize the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act of 1992.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC-4179. A communication from the Director of the Office of Regulatory Management and Information, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, two rules including a rule entitled "Solid Waste Disposal Facility Criteria," (RIN2050-AE24, FRL5607-3) received on September 24, 1996; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-4180. A communication from the Chairman and Management Member of the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, transmitting jointly, the notice of opposition to the proposed "Railroad Retirement Amendment Act of 1996"; to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated: