

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Committee calls for indexing farm support

Democrats on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee drafted a proposal on May 15 that would index the government's \$53 billion farm support program to a cost-of-living escalator.

Although the proposal is estimated to add \$1.1 billion to the subsidy program over five years, it is generally considered a hedge against inflation, rather than a net addition. Committee members, anxious that there will be no possibility of increasing farm aid at a time when austerity is the watchword on Capitol Hill, are using the proposal to "minimize the pain" for the farmers, as one senator put it.

Senate passes \$2.9 billion AIDS bill

The Senate on May 16 overwhelmingly approved a bill authorizing an estimated \$2.9 billion over five years to help 13 cities and all states treat the growing number of AIDS victims. The bill, sponsored by Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), was passed on a 95-4 vote.

Although Senator Kennedy noted "the real danger" that public hospitals serving AIDS patients may collapse as a result of a lack of funds, the bill earmarks only \$300 million in fiscal 1991 for the 13 U.S. cities hardest hit by AIDS. The cities must use the emergency funds to assist public or nonprofit health facilities that serve large numbers of poor people with the disease.

The bill also authorizes \$300 million in grants in fiscal 1991 to the states to provide continuing care, early intervention services, and outpatient care for AIDS victims.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) intro-

duced an amendment which would have made it a federal crime to knowingly donate or sell blood, semen, tissues, organs, or other bodily fluids if the person knows he or she is infected with the HIV virus, or has been an intravenous drug user or prostitute at any time since Jan. 1, 1977. The Helms amendment was defeated 47-52.

The bill would also authorize spending "such sums as may be necessary" for three more years through fiscal 1995.

In the House, the Energy and Commerce Committee on May 16 passed a bill with similar provisions, which is expected to pass the full House within the next few weeks. The two bills would then have to be reconciled. A high official of the Health and Human Services Department said the administration was concerned about the cost of the bill, and was reluctant to set the precedent of earmarking emergency funds for a specific disease.

Conyers accuses DoJ of harassing black officials

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) got into a bit of an argument with Attorney General Richard Thornburgh in hearings before the House Judiciary Committee on May 16, when Conyers asked whether the Department of Justice was harassing black elected officials. Conyers cited the recent prosecution of Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.) and the current federal investigation of D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, as examples of federal abuse. Conyers urged Thornburgh to exert more "oversight" over U.S. Attorneys who prosecute black officials.

Thornburgh retorted that it was "totally and absolutely false" to claim that federal prosecutions of blacks or

other minorities are based on racial prejudice. Conyers pointed to the Ford trial, in which the DoJ had sought a new bank fraud trial for the black congressman after a mistrial was declared on April 27, when the jury failed to reach a verdict.

"How many trials, how many juries does he have to have before you will be satisfied?" asked Conyers. The congressman also noted that Detroit Mayor Coleman Young had been the target of the longest-lasting FBI surveillance in U.S. history. Conyers said that this was just "the beginning of the public discussion of this issue."

German scientist urged to return to U.S.

Rep. James Traficant, Jr. (D-Ohio) issued a call on May 12 for scientist Dr. Arthur Rudolph to return to the United States and force the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) to prove its charges against him, or drop its accusation that he engaged in Nazi war crimes.

Traficant spoke at a dinner arranged by supporters and former colleagues of Rudolph, a retired NASA rocket scientist who was forced to surrender his U.S. citizenship and relocate to Germany as a result of unproven allegations that he had mistreated slave laborers at a rocket factory in Germany at which he worked during the war. The dinner was arranged to raise money which could be used for a possible legal fight by Rudolph, who has denied the charges. An Army investigation in 1947 had absolved Rudolph of any war crimes, as did a recent investigation by the West German government.

Representative Traficant accused a "powerful Jewish lobby" of trying to

intimidate elected officials who might otherwise agree with his assertion that the case lacks merit. "The Jewish groups that support the OSI," said Traficant, "should consider that if we let this government violate the rights of an old Nazi who is not a criminal, they could just as easily violate the rights of Jewish Americans."

Concessions to Soviets called a 'betrayal'

In comments on the Senate floor on May 15, Sen. Donald Riegle (D-Mich.) attacked the administration for not paying any heed to the various congressional resolutions calling for U.S. action to stop the Soviets from their repressive measures against the Baltic states.

"Apparently unmoved by either the continuing Soviet aggression in the Baltic states, or the Senate's call for an appropriate United States response to that aggression," said Riegle, "the Bush administration has concluded the United States-Soviet trade talks and has conditionally agreed to grant the Soviets MFN [Most Favored Nation] status. And now, in the latest in the series of green-light signals sent to Moscow, the Bush administration plans to urge granting of Soviet observer status in GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]."

Riegle noted that the Senate had called on the administration *not* to proceed with the granting of MFN trade status until the Soviets ceased their coercive actions against Lithuania. "To reward the Soviets at this ugly moment in their history is a betrayal not only of our Baltic friends, but a betrayal of our own honor and principles as champions of democracy," Riegle said.

Congressman looks to SDI spinoffs

Rep. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) outlined some of the spinoff benefits already achieved in the Strategic Defense Initiative, in comments on the floor of the House on May 9.

Kyl indicated that "research into navigation technology has ushered in a whole new class of miniaturized inertial measurement units of navigation and guidance in this decade and beyond. Units that weighed 40 pounds and cost \$70,000 in 1970 now weigh only 1 pound and cost approximately \$5,000."

Second, he pointed out that the U.S. is now learning how to manufacture large quantities of infrared detector elements known as pixels, at greatly reduced costs. Third, computer advances achieved through the SDI program have offered the possibility of producing high-speed computers that can be assembled in very small packages—about the size of a deck of playing cards.

Kyl also noted that the U.S., thanks to the advances in semiconductor electronics stimulated by the SDI research, could recapture some of the world market in this area. In medicine, the SDI program has helped develop a laser-treatment process that cleanses blood bank supplies of the entire family of viruses which includes herpes, measles, hepatitis-B, and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Funding for art group founders in mid-stream

The bill to reauthorize the National Endowment for the Arts proposed by the White House is running into trouble, as House Republicans are bolting from supporting the bill. Rep. Pat Williams

(D-Mt.), who chairs the House subcommittee with jurisdiction over the NEA, said that it would be "very difficult to pass the President's proposal unamended through the Congress."

The NEA came under congressional fire when it helped finance exhibits featuring works of homosexual "artist" Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano. The exhibits included both obscene and blasphemous images and led to a call for restrictions on NEA funding.

Arts leaders want reauthorization of the NEA as it was first set up 25 years ago—a view also supported by the President. The President's bill, therefore, contains no restrictive language. Republican House leaders, however, unveiled a bill to strip the endowment of most grant-dispensing duties, prevent it from funding obscene art, and make it more accountable to taxpayers.

Murtha squeaks by in congressional race

Rep. John P. Murtha (D-Penn.), chairman of the powerful appropriations subcommittee on defense and a key political player in the House, barely won his race for his party's congressional nomination, with 51% of the vote in a three-way race.

One of his opponents was John K. Shrader, a LaRouche Democrat.

Murtha ran into complaints that for all his influence in Washington, he hasn't done enough to boost the local economy in his depression-ridden district in western Pennsylvania. The eight-term incumbent had spent \$365,000 as of the end of March on his campaign, and had gotten endorsements from former House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Chrysler Corp. chairman Lee Iacocca.