

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Senate moves to gut SDI program

The Senate voted 54-44 on Aug. 4 to radically restructure the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program, essentially relegating research to development of a ground-based system. This is the first time that Congress has attempted to rewrite the entire program.

The proposal would apparently forgo a space-based system using the militarily and economically more advantageous and technologically advanced laser weapons systems to annihilate incoming nuclear missiles—the conception elaborated by political economist Lyndon LaRouche, then working in an unofficial capacity with the Reagan administration, and by President Reagan himself in his speech of March 23, 1983, when he announced his commitment to the SDI.

The Senate measure, appended to the Defense Appropriations bill, would cripple the Brilliant Pebbles program (in which small interceptor rockets would track, hit, and destroy attacking missiles), which has been the primary research effort of the Bush administration. The Senate measure reduces the administration's request for Brilliant Pebbles from \$329 million to \$129 million, which is its present funding level, and transfers the difference to research on ground-based systems that would not breach U.S.-Soviet treaties, and to other programs that would take longer to develop.

The Senate also reduced by \$1 billion the \$4.7 billion overall administration request. The vote is a major blow to the program, since the Senate has traditionally been more supportive of the SDI than has the House, which wants to reduce the SDI funding to \$2.9 billion. Current funding for the SDI is around \$3.8 billion.

When the bill passed, the administration issued a statement of policy saying that Defense Secretary Richard Cheney would recommend a veto of the appropriations bill if it did not include "proper funding or flexibility" for the SDI.

Congress approves small AIDS funding

Congress approved on Aug. 4 legislation authorizing an estimated \$4.4 billion over the next five years to help cities hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic. The bill authorizes spending of up to \$875 million a year for the next two years, and sums sufficient to continue the program for the following three years.

It is considered unlikely, however, that the Congress will appropriate the full amount, because of budget constraints.

Health officials in New York City have stated that the amounts they would receive under this legislation are grossly inadequate for meeting the present catastrophic situation. For the current fiscal year, Congress has appropriated \$1.7 billion to combat AIDS, money which goes almost exclusively for education, prevention, and research.

New moves against black officials

In a continuing pattern of legal persecution of black elected officials, Rep. Floyd Flake (D-N.Y.) was indicted on charges of misappropriating \$75,200 from a federally subsidized housing complex built by his church, and with evading taxes on \$66,700 of the church's money that he and his wife

put to personal use.

Flake, the pastor of the Allen A.M.E Church, one of the largest black churches in New York City, has denied any wrongdoing. Members of Flake's church contend that the charges are racially motivated. There was also general support for Flake in his Queens district, where the 300-unit housing project from which he is accused of taking money, is one of the few successful projects for senior citizens in the nation.

In a blow to the Department of Justice operations, Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.), a black congressman, crushed his primary opponents in an election on Aug. 4, winning 75% in a race for re-election. Ford was accused two years ago of bank and mail fraud, but was acquitted in April after a jury was unable to arrive at a verdict. The DoJ then announced its intention to re-indict the congressman, in an apparent effort to hurt his re-election chances.

Civil Rights bill approved, faces veto

The House on Aug. 3 passed the Civil Rights Act of 1990 by a 272-154 vote, but it faces a veto threat from President Bush, who claims that the legislation would set racial quotas on private businesses.

House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-Ill.) and Rep. John LaFalce (D-N.Y.) worked to pass an alternative acceptable to the White House, which would have eliminated language that Bush said encouraged minority hiring by quotas. The alternative was killed on Aug. 2 after Democratic leaders pressured Democrats to withdraw support.

LaFalce refused, arguing that there would be no civil rights bill if Bush vetoed it, but other Democratic

supporters of the Michel alternative were persuaded to withdraw their support, on condition that certain amendments be added to address White House concerns.

The bill is intended to overturn six recent rulings by the new majority of the Supreme Court. A similar bill in the Senate had been approved earlier, 65-34.

Hill leaders seek cuts despite depression

Congressional leaders announced on Aug. 6 that the threat of a "recession" and the danger of skyrocketing oil prices should not deter them from moving for major cuts in the U.S. budget.

"It is tremendously attractive to members of Congress to think that this whole problem of the budget summit might just conveniently disappear a month before elections," said House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.). "We ought not let the easy decisions predominate."

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Sen. James Sasser (D-Tenn.) said that the price of not cutting the deficit would be greater than the price of making the cuts. "We still need to go ahead with a significant deficit-reduction package," Sasser said. "That's the only way the Federal Reserve Board is going to be able to lower interest rates."

Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan had earlier indicated that he might lower interest rates if a budget agreement could be reached. But the turmoil in the Mideast has created problems for budget negotiators. One of the possible revenue-creating schemes was to raise energy taxes, a measure which would be exceedingly difficult with the price of oil and gaso-

line now skyrocketing. Budget negotiations collapsed before the Congress adjourned for the August recess, and are scheduled to resume shortly after the Congress returns after Labor Day.

Some negotiators indicated that they will meet a Sept. 10 deadline for an agreement, although their staffs have cautioned that both sides are still far apart and there is no indication that an agreement will be rapidly forthcoming. In addition, Democrats and Republicans intend to use the breakdown in the talks as an election issue. President Bush has said that he will be campaigning on behalf of GOP candidates in order to blame Democrats for the failure of the talks.

Although both sides are in agreement that harsh austerity must be imposed on the U.S. population, the risk of being blamed for this and the rapid onset of the depression during an election year, has impeded implementation of the program.

Bill making EPA a cabinet post is stalled

The much-touted proposal to upgrade the Environmental Protection Agency to a cabinet-level post is languishing in committee, while the burgeoning oil crisis and the rapid erosion of U.S. industry are making such a measure increasingly unattractive.

"I think it's sort of stalled," said Sen. William Roth (R-Del.), one of the key sponsors of the bill, which was introduced in January.

President Bush had expressed support for such legislation earlier, as a part of his hype about being the "environmental President," but he has been quiet on the issue since.

In March, the House had voted 371-55 to create a Department of the

Environment, but had added requirements which the White House viewed as a congressional attempt to "micro-manage" the Executive Branch. Bush let it be known that he would veto any bill containing these requirements. Even in the Senate, the measure has led to so many differences that it is uncertain if it will even get to the floor.

Recriminations fly as S&L debacle discussed

Tempers flared amid a lot of finger-pointing as five members of Congress and a former senator gathered at a *Washington Times* forum on Aug. 4 to discuss the causes of the savings and loan crisis.

Sen. Jake Garn (R-Utah), the Senate Banking Committee's ranking Republican, angrily threatened to walk out of the meeting after Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) blamed the S&L debacle on the 1982 Garn-St Germain bill, which deregulated the thrift industry.

At another point in the debate, Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) lectured Garn that he should "get his manners straight."

Garn tried to throw the blame on a do-nothing Congress, of which he himself has been an important part. "There were plenty of signs and plenty of reports" indicating the growing S&L problems, said Garn. "They were ignored over and over again." Garn urged against "making this a partisan issue," although Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa) fittingly dubbed it the "best challenger issue in American politics."

Rep. Torricelli noted that "errors were made," and demagogically warned that "some people should pay for those errors with their careers."