

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Biden would deny China favored trade status

Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) called for denying the People's Republic of China Most Favored Nation status because of its role in "weapons proliferation." The Biden move comes after a spate of articles in the news media about the alleged sale of nuclear weapons technology to Algeria and other countries.

Although the Bush administration bent over backwards in maintaining good relations with China in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the move seems to be in tandem with the administration's new world order, which targets Third World countries for genocidal economic sanctions on the pretext of preventing the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons.

'Fast track' faces growing opposition

Opposition is growing in Congress to the imposition of a "fast track" authority on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations.

On April 22, Rep. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) protested the attempt to push through the fast track. "Now they want to negotiate an agreement with Mexico. Frankly, I have no problem negotiating an agreement with Mexico. It just ought not to be on the fast track, where they negotiate the agreement, and they lay it here, and they say you have got 60 days to approve it, with no amendments. You have no opportunity, Congress, to review it and make changes and improvements and amendments. Fast

track means we negotiate it, and you swallow it, and swallow it whole."

Dorgan also complained that there was also a problem because the U.S. had no policies "that describe what it is we want for our country's long-term economic self-interest."

Dorgan criticized the free market policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations. Under them, said Dorgan, "our policy is to say we do not care what happens. If the free market dictates it should happen, so be it. . . . Well, I think that is absolutely crazy."

Some Republicans are also critical of the fast-track negotiations. Rep. Helen Dentlich Bentley (R-Md.) criticized the "rush to push through two major trade agreements," calling it "trade policy driven by desperation or expediency." Bentley attacked the "free market/trade ideologues" saying that a "generation of businesses" was lost as a result of that ideology.

Although Bentley was calling for more protectionist measures, she pointed out the need for some form of industrial policy and a "pluralist approach to government control and intervention," rather than a "purist" free market approach. "We have had excellent results in government-supported operations like the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and the record of the first 20 years of the space agency shine," she said.

Bentley warned that some reform of economic policy must be formulated to pull the country out of its misery, "lest the summer of our discontent become the winter of the people's disillusionment with us all."

In spite of the concern expressed by Dorgan and Bentley, there are a number of deals in the works which indicate that, barring significant pressure, Congress will go along with the fast-track negotiations. In one dangerous compromise proposed by Sen.

Don Riegle (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, the "no amendment" rules of the fast-track process would allow members of Congress to introduce amendments in only five specific areas of the agreement, including labor and environmental standards. The Riegle compromise would eliminate the 20-hour limit on floor debate on NAFTA, but retain the requirements for a final vote no later than 15 days after the agreement is taken up on the floor.

House shifts funds in rejecting Bush budget

The House on April 17 rejected the Bush administration's budget proposal, and approved one worked out by the House Budget Committee on a 261-163 vote. The \$1.46 trillion budget does little to offset the disastrous budget summit agreement between the Congress and the White House last year.

The Bush proposal had included a total of \$46.6 billion in reductions in Medicare and other entitlement programs over five years and was rejected 335-89, with 74 Republicans joining 260 Democrats in voting against the Bush budget. The House proposal provides for higher spending than Bush sought for education, Head Start, nutrition and job assistance, and veterans' medical care.

The budget proposal made a three-fold increase in the amount of money going to education programs, including substantial increases for compensatory education, math, science, vocational, and adult education, and student aid. The House resolution also quadruples the President's request for Head Start to \$350 million, which will increase by 72,000 the number of chil-

dren served by the program.

Unfortunately, in accordance with their adherence to the guidelines of last year's budget summit, the funds redirected by the House were taken from the space and science programs. The House proposal cut the administration's minuscule proposal for the NASA budget by another \$1.2 billion, endangering the development of Space Station Freedom.

Greenspan opposes Bush borrowing from Fed

In testimony before the Senate Banking Committee on April 22, Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan opposed the administration's plan to borrow money from the Treasury as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. runs short of cash. Greenspan said he felt it might "compromise the independent conduct of monetary policy."

The administration's plan for "economic reform" would open up the commercial banking system to all sorts of investors and grant banks the ability to sell stocks and other new powers which they have been seeking as a desperate means to remain solvent. Such a "deregulation" to attain quick financial relief would lead to the same speculative boondoggles which have bedeviled the savings and loan system.

Greenspan also noted that the economy is "still moving lower. . . . Week by week, the daily numbers still indicate that there is a modest decline." A new audit by the General Accounting Office, released on April 26, shows that the FDIC fund is worth only about \$4-5 billion rather than the \$8.4 billion reported by the FDIC at the end of 1990.

House Democratic leaders have

also agreed on a plan to let the FDIC borrow directly from the U.S. Treasury if its reserve fund is further depleted by bank failures. The opposition by Greenspan and the House action seriously jeopardize the administration's deregulation plan for the banking system. The GAO had come up with the larger figure because it concluded that many more banks were already effectively insolvent than the FDIC had claimed.

Queen Elizabeth to address joint session

House Speaker Rep. Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) has extended an invitation to Queen Elizabeth to address a joint session of Congress on May 18. The invitation was extended by the Speaker after the Queen announced that she was going to make an official visit to the United States in May.

It is unclear whether this was done at the behest of the administration, but Foley's office assures reporters that the administration is very much in favor of the move.

Heflin resolution would reform judicial voir dire

Sen. Howell Heflin (D-Ala.) introduced legislation on April 18 which would reform the *voir dire* procedures by which potential jurors are selected to sit on a jury.

The reform proposal comes after an outcry from attorneys who have complained that the ability to examine prospective jurors for possible prejudice has been seriously restricted by the power of the judge to decide if and how the *voir dire* procedure will be conducted.

"I believe that the attorneys representing clients are best equipped to elicit bias in potential jurors," said Heflin in introducing the bill, which will be referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. "Attorneys are generally more knowledgeable about the facts of a particular case and by participating in the *voir dire* process are better equipped to elicit a potential juror's bias which may not be readily apparent."

Present federal rules permit attorneys to participate in conducting *voir dire* only at the discretion of the court. The Heflin resolution would guarantee an attorney's participation in the examination of prospective jurors. Initially this will apply only to civil cases, rather than criminal cases, and will be conducted in a number of experimental districts to see the effects of the reform. Heflin crafted the bill in this way in order to dampen the opposition to such legislation which has been forthcoming from federal judges who believe that such changes would undermine their authority in the courtroom.

Move to award Thatcher gold medal fails

An initiative introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Bill Paxon (R-N.Y.) to award a gold medal to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher when she visited the United States in March failed to get anywhere, after Paxon was unable to get more than 12 co-sponsors. The plan was then dropped.

The Bush White House, however, saw fit to award Thatcher a gold medal on its own, and this move was approved by the more imperial U.S. Senate.