

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Bush backs down on civil rights bill

The Bush administration has agreed to accept civil rights legislation which it had previously attacked as a "quota bill."

The text of the bill was worked out between congressional leaders and White House officials on Oct. 24. The administration was opposed to the legislation, which awarded damages to members of minorities who could prove that they were being intentionally discriminated against with regard to job hiring and promotion. One compromise worked out by Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.) and a half-dozen other moderate Republicans, included some protection for employers against litigation.

The administration initially indicated that it would also reject the Danforth compromise but, faced with a teetering economy which is hitting blacks and minorities especially hard, the administration decided it would win more by not pursuing the quota debate. Publicly, the White House is claiming that the compromise eliminates quotas.

Conservative Republicans opposed to the legislation, however, charge that the changes were a fig leaf to cover an administration capitulation.

The purpose of the legislation is ostensibly to roll back a series of Supreme Court decisions which effectively reversed many of the gains made by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the compromise, limits were set on punitive damages for those litigating cases of sexual discrimination, while no limits have been placed on cases of racial discrimination.

The publicity given "sexual harassment" in the Clarence Thomas nomination has, however, put pressure on legislators to lift caps on dam-

ages sought in cases of sexual discrimination.

Democrats trying to assuage the opposition indicate that caps will be removed in separate legislation next year in order to pass the civil rights bill.

There will be no peace dividend, says Rep. Brown

In a discussion with science writers in mid-October, Rep. George Brown (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, said that there will not be a "peace dividend" from the end of the Cold War which could be used to fund science programs.

Brown said that, at most, defense cuts will produce \$20 billion per year, while the budget deficit will be more than \$300 billion, and the administration believes the defense reductions should go to reduce the deficit. "It is unrealistic to have great hope things will open up from defense cuts," he stated.

Brown also noted that no one yet knew how much the savings and loan institutions bailout would cost, nor the cost of bailing out the commercial banks.

In order to increase funding for science, Brown said, either the U.S. would have to have major cuts in entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, or real economic growth of 5% per year, a situation which he said was in "never never land with present policies."

Brown supported the proposal—violently opposed by the White House—to expand use of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency for dual-use technology development. Brown warned that the "buy Ameri-

can" proposals are counterproductive, because science is a global operation and would only benefit from having no restrictions.

House passes surface transportation act

The House passed on Oct. 23 by a vote of 343-83 the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act, which authorizes \$150 billion-plus over several years for highway and mass transit programs. The Senate version of the bill, passed on June 19, includes \$750 million for a five-year mag-lev R&D effort, which is not included in the House bill, and \$21 billion for mass transit. The Senate version authorizes \$4.7 billion more than the administration requested, but less than the \$32 billion authorized by the House.

The funding level is a joke compared to the nation's estimated \$4 trillion infrastructure needs, but the debate focused attention on the importance of infrastructure investment to the economy.

In remarks on the floor, Public Works Committee Chairman Rep. Robert Roe (D-N.J.) stressed that "infrastructure investment is the means, and yes, the only means, to create the new wealth of the nation that is essential to pay for our people's needs, such as education, health care, housing and the other necessities of life."

Rep. Bill Emerson (R-Mo.) reminded his free-market colleagues about the "proud heritage" the Republicans had in their Whig antecedents, mentioning in particular Whig leader Henry Clay (whom Emerson notes was nicknamed "Old Capital Improvements Harry").

For these people, infrastructural development was viewed as the motor

of capitalist development.

Neither body went along with the Bush proposal to foist onto the states more of the spending for highways and surface transport. Bush had threatened to veto any bill with gas tax increases, and that proposal was subsequently dropped from the original House version.

Resolution seeks recognition of Croatia

Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.) has introduced House Concurrent Resolution 224 which calls for the recognition of the republics of Croatia and Slovenia. The resolution, which has 11 co-sponsors (10 Republicans and 1 Democrat), will face an uphill fight in Congress.

In the House Foreign Affairs Committee, leading Democrats, including committee chairman Rep. Dante Fascell (D-Fla.) and Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), oppose recognition. The bill also faces opposition from the State Department which has, through its consistent attempt to maintain the fiction of Yugoslavia, given the green light to Serbian aggression. Recognizing Croatia would give this beleaguered country a basis to request outside aid in meeting the military aggression of the Serb-dominated federal Army.

A similar resolution will soon be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), who has also proposed supplying the Croatians with anti-aircraft and anti-tank equipment if cease-fire agreements are not honored by the Serbs. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) has already introduced a resolution to impose a trade embargo on Serbia until it ceases its aggression.

Helms calls for renegotiating START

Sen. Jesse Helms (D-N.C.), ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in floor comments Oct. 25, urged President Bush not to send the strategic arms limitation (START) treaty to the Senate. Helms called for its complete renegotiation "if and when there is a competent authority with whom to negotiate" in the former Soviet Union.

Noting that some of the republics, such as Ukraine, which has begun forming its own army, have refused to agree to the provisions of START, Helms said that any treaty regarding the entire former U.S.S.R. will be difficult to verify.

Helms complained about the highly unorthodox manner in which Bush and Gorbachov signed a treaty, the text of which was not even worked out. Under normal circumstances, Helms said, the text of a treaty is made available to the public immediately. "But almost three months have gone by, and Congress still does not know what was agreed to in all specifics."

Helms claimed that the data submitted by the Soviets as the basis of the treaty contained "a serious flaw."

Banking reform advances as White House protests

The two key committees responsible for reforming the nation's banking system agreed Oct. 24 to a version of a bill which would repeal the 1930s Glass-Steagall Act, and thus allow banks into the securities business. The reform bill would, however, supposedly maintain "firewalls" between the two activities.

The agreement was reached between House Banking Committee

Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) and Energy and Commerce Chairman John Dingell (D-Mich.). The administration's banking reform bill would have allowed industrial enterprises, like General Motors, to own banks, a measure which would be forbidden according to the formula worked out by the two committees.

The compromise also imposes tighter restrictions on the ability of banks to enter the insurance business than those sought by the administration. Representatives of many of the nation's big banks, along with officials of the largest bank lobbying groups, met with the House leadership the same day the compromise was reached to complain about the legislation. The Treasury is now moving to scrap the legislation entirely.

Two Reps. sign on to lifting Iraq sanctions

The chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Rep. Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.), and Rep. Mervyn Dymally (D-Calif.), a member of the Black Caucus and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, have co-sponsored House Res. 180, introduced by Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) in June, which calls for lifting economic sanctions against Iraq.

Iraq's refusal to yield its sovereignty and agree to have the U.N. administer the sale of its oil appears to make H.R. 168, sponsored by Rep. Tim Penny (D-Minn.), irrelevant. It calls for Unicef to administer a portion of Iraq's frozen assets for humanitarian relief.

A second Harvard Study Team recently returned from Iraq, and reconfirmed the horrible plight of Iraqi children.