

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Senate group sees no Soviet 'brain drain'

Recently returned from a trip to the Soviet Union with other senators, Sen. James Exon (D-Neb.) said in floor comments on Jan. 31 that the delegation found "no definite evidence" of "atomic mercenaries or a brain drain of scientists to Third World nations" from the former Soviet Union.

The assessment contradicted the press hype on the subject, although Exon did claim that all officials they met with were concerned that many scientists "may" be tempted by "lucrative offers." Exon said that he gave President Yeltsin a 50-50 chance of surviving politically under present economic conditions.

Greenspan says economic 'erosion is stabilizing'

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, testifying at his confirmation hearings for reappointment as Fed boss, told the Senate Banking Committee on Jan. 29 that there were "subtle signs" that "the erosion in the economy is beginning to stabilize." The sanguine Greenspan felt that no major fiscal stimulus package was necessary, but was confident that the economy would pick up on its own, "independently of what other fiscal policy moves the Congress chooses to make."

Greenspan opposed any intervention into the workings of the market. "My only concern about fiscal policy moves is that it is very easy to overdo them, and I think we have sufficient experience of overloading the system, which suggests to me that we have to be quite careful," said Greenspan.

Greenspan said that the alleged shortage of credit, despite the Fed's cut in the interest rate on Dec. 20, was

beginning to "flatten," but that banks were wary to increase loans until they were confident that the loans they had on their books would stop hemorrhaging. Greenspan praised the administration's "stimulus package" because he did not consider it a "major" package, and therefore wouldn't create long-term problems in the economy.

Raymond A. Worseck, chief economist from A.G. Edwards and Sons, Inc., also testifying before the Banking Committee, characterized the Bush budget package as "anemic."

The senators were not happy with Greenspan's response. "We need something more than we've already done in the way of monetary policy," said Sen. Donald Riegle (D-Mich.), chairman of the committee. "I am very concerned about waiting any longer to see some bounce in the economy."

Warren Commission crowd retreats on file release

As the discrediting of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President Kennedy by the Oliver Stone film "JFK" continues to build, the lone surviving member of the Warren Commission, former President Gerald Ford, called for the release of the files of the House Assassinations Committee, as well as CIA and FBI files on the assassination. The commissioners have hitherto refused to consider releasing the files.

Ford issued the call in letters to House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) and to Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), who chaired the assassinations committee.

Since Congress can only release the assassination committee's work—the FBI and CIA files being controlled by the Executive Branch—Ford's action suggests that committee files have

been heavily sanitized. Stokes believes that the evidence of "conspiracy" behind the assassination involves the mafia; but such a view lets much higher-level political forces off the hook. Selective release of files blaming the mafia would do little to unmask the Warren Commission coverup.

Ford says he still believes that Lee Harvey Oswald was alone in the assassination of President Kennedy, but says he is calling for disclosure of the records in order to "resolve any legitimate doubts of others."

Similarly, in a joint statement released Jan. 30, thirteen former counsel and staff members of the Warren Commission also called for the release of the files to the public. They have also requested the Archivist of the United States, Don W. Wilson, to release the remaining 2% of Warren Commission evidence that is still under seal. In addition to the Warren Commission and House committee files, there are hundreds of thousands of pages of CIA and FBI records still being withheld.

Keep trade restrictions on Azerbaidzhan

Because of the continued military action by Azerbaidzhan against the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, Sen. John Seymour (R-Calif.) introduced legislation on Jan. 30 to keep a variety of trade, loan guarantee, and foreign assistance restrictions that were imposed on the former Soviet Union, in place against Azerbaidzhan. The restrictions are being lifted in the case of the other republics.

The bill would also prohibit any future U.S. contributions to international programs designed exclusively for the government of Azerbaidzhan, and would "ensure that no American support is funneled to the country

through other multilateral initiatives intended to benefit the other deserving republics of the new commonwealth."

The bill would allow President Bush to remove the restrictions if he certifies that Azerbaïdzhan has lifted its blockade against Nagorno-Karabakh and has "stated a commitment to resolve peacefully its conflict" with its citizens.

Dems lambast Bush 'State of the Union' hypocrisy

The Bush ultimatum to Congress to "pass his agenda" by March 20 was used to the full by the Bushmen in Congress to bully Democrats into "following the President's lead." Some Democrats fell into line, but others responded with astonishment to the Feb. 28 State of the Union address.

Rep. David Skaggs (D-Colo.) noted that "it was ironic for this President to be posturing about prompt action and drawing a line in the sand at March 20. Is this the same George Bush who dawdled for months, at one point calling the legislation we passed garbage, before accepting the fact that millions of out-of-work Americans needed an extension of unemployment coverage? And was it this same President who just last month was still burying his head and denying the economy had problems?"

Rep. Patsy Mink (D-Hi.) noted that Bush's "only jobs program is a highway bill that he fought against for three years and that Congress had already enacted last session." Mink called Bush's failure over the last six months or longer to understand what ails this country "mind-boggling."

Even Bush Democrats like Sen. David Pryor (D-Ark.) were dumbfounded by Bush's speech, calling it a "reflection of the trouble that this presidency is in at this time." Pryor

said in floor comments on Jan. 29 that although he had tried to be a "basic supporter of the President in many of his policies," he found the administration "in a great deal of trouble and in extreme disarray."

Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.) commented that Bush, far from "seeing the light," was "feeling the heat."

Senate ups pressure for Bush to attend Eco-92

In a resolution introduced Jan. 31 by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and co-sponsored by a number of key senators including Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, further pressure was placed on Bush to play a high-profile role in the upcoming "Earth Summit," or Eco-92, scheduled for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June.

The resolution calls on Bush to "support an international convention to reduce the threat of global climate change," to "support the acceleration of international efforts to reduce the emission of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer," and to "ultimately phase out the use of such chemicals." The resolution also urges Bush to "play a strong and active role in cooperating with other governments to prepare for" a successful Earth Summit.

Kerry noted that although "every other member of the Group of Seven industrialized countries has committed to sending its head of state" to Eco-92, there was still no commitment from Bush to attend.

In an election year, Bush is not keen on playing the role of "environmental President" to an economically hard-hit electorate. Nevertheless, the Rio conference is seen by the administration as an important element of its

policy of utilizing supranational organizations like the U.N. to eliminate Third World development.

SDIO forced to purchase Soviet reactor

In testimony before the Science, Space, and Technology Committee on Jan. 28, Dr. Dwight Duston, the director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO)'s Innovative Science and Technology Division, remarked that the cuts in the SDIO budget, combined with its reorientation toward a Limited Defense System, have forced the SDIO to purchase a Soviet Topaz II reactor for use in a U.S. test program. The SDIO withdrew from a tri-agency program, involving the SDIO, the Department of Energy, and NASA, to develop the SP-100 nuclear space reactor.

The initial program called for the development of a reactor which could produce 100 kilowatts of energy to provide power for highly capable surveillance systems, housekeeping power for directed energy weapons, and electric propulsion for orbital transfer. But \$1.5 billion was cut by Congress from the SDI budget, thus forcing the SDIO to scale down its program. Since the initial aims of the SDI required a great amount of energy, necessitating the larger reactor, they felt that they could make do by purchasing the needed technology rather than participating in the development of the larger reactor—if the Soviet reactor is compatible with U.S. systems.

Duston made it clear, however, that although they are scaling down space energy needs in the light of the budget, the scaling-down has certain built-in limits, beyond which it cannot meet the limited goals of the present program.