

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Mitchell offers health care compromise

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) announced on Aug. 2 a health care proposal designed to cover at least 95% of Americans shortly after the turn of the century. The Mitchell plan includes his priority of swiftly subsidizing uninsured children and pregnant women, and long-term home care programs and prescription drug coverage for the elderly.

The proposal would rely on a series of voluntary measures, subsidies, tax incentives, and changes in insurance regulations to make insurance more affordable and more accessible. As a fallback, a controversial requirement that businesses pay half their workers' insurance costs could go into effect in the year 2002.

The measure is an attempt to win over more conservative Democrats who had opposed the health care plan proposed by the President. Mitchell's announcement marks the beginning of the floor fight over health care.

The Mitchell plan includes President Clinton's goal of universal coverage by introducing new subsidies for low-income people to be phased in beginning in 1997, on condition that this not increase the deficit.

McCloskey: urgent to lift Bosnia arms embargo

In comments on the House floor on July 28, Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.) called again on the Clinton administration to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia-Herzegovina. "We need a much greater sense of urgency in ending this tragedy," McCloskey said, "as people grow increasingly terrified in Sarajevo, as ethnic cleansing and genocide continue in numerous other areas of Bosnia." The Serbs con-

tinue their war of aggression, and have even shut down the Sarajevo airport, one of the U.N. "safe havens."

McCloskey was seconded by House Majority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.). "If Serbia keeps hitting targets in Bosnia," said Bonior, "then targets in Serbia itself should be blasted right back. . . . The only thing that will truly bring the Serbs to the peace table, is if they see that their force will be met by force and that further aggression will get them nowhere. . . . If we don't lift this embargo and at least let the people of Bosnia defend themselves, then the blood of Bosnia isn't just on the hands of the Serbs. It's on all of us."

Senate panel rejects peacekeeping fund

The Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee on June 25 approved a \$244 billion defense Appropriation bill, rejecting President Clinton's request for a \$300 million peacekeeping fund. The action was the latest show of congressional discontent with peacekeeping operations. Otherwise the subcommittee approved most of the Clinton administration's major requests, including \$3.6 billion for a nuclear aircraft carrier and \$2.8 billion for six C-17 military transport planes.

Subcommittee Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-Hi.) opposed the peacekeeping fund, saying congressional approval should continue to be required for U.S. involvement in each proposed operation. Other committees have approved the fund, however, so that the differences will have to be worked out in House-Senate conference.

Dissatisfaction with U.N. peacekeeping operations is in evidence in various places on Capitol Hill. The Senate on July 22 cut \$350

million out of a \$1.2 billion U.S. payment for U.N. peacekeeping costs, and voted to spend the money instead to reimburse border states' cost of jailing illegal aliens.

Inouye said the \$244 billion defense bill is enough to equip the U.S. military for now, but that it would "fall short of what is needed to preserve our military superiority." Inouye said that the Pentagon expects to save enough over the next few years from personnel cuts and base closings to buy combat planes and other weapons needed for defense superiority later, but that he was "not sold on this idea." The subcommittee bill would also restore \$821 million of the \$900 million cut by its counterpart in the House for defense research by universities.

Lawmakers urge nations to keep anti-abortion laws

Seventy-three U.S. congressmen, including 10 Democrats and 63 Republicans, sent a letter on July 18 to the leaders of all the nations that will be represented at the U.N. Cairo conference on population in September, warning them not to change their anti-abortion laws because of pressure from the population control lobby.

"We urge your delegation to the upcoming Cairo population control conference to reject any proposal or language in the final document designed to weaken or nullify the anti-abortion laws in your country and the approximately 100 nations around the world that currently protect their children from abortion on demand," the letter stated.

"Unrestricted abortion has had a devastating impact on our country," legislators warned. "There has been a decline in respect for unborn children, women, and family life in general. In

many ways, human life has become cheap. It is no longer respected as a gift with innate value.

"With respect to reports of pressure concerning abortion language in the Cairo document, we intend to intervene actively if any U.S. officials, U.S. conference delegates, or international organizations seek to encroach on the rights and responsibilities of nations in this sensitive area," they promised.

"Finally, know that we stand in solidarity with you—and the children and mothers of your land—as you resist and reject every attempt to pressure or intimidate your sovereign nation into accepting abortion on demand."

Finance Committee delays GATT funding debate

The Senate Finance Committee on July 28 delayed a vote on funding for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) because of changes by the administration in its funding package. Chairman Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) said that the changes prevented a full committee vote. "The administration has got to take this funding matter seriously. The Uruguay Round is in jeopardy if it is not funded," he said.

The ranking Republican, Bob Packwood (Oreg.), warned the administration that budget restraints would hinder any vote on GATT unless it is "fully paid for and budget-neutral." "This bill is dead, dead, dead unless the administration comes up with the \$2.5 billion needed to make up shortfalls," Packwood said. Once GATT is implemented, the federal government estimates it will lose some \$12 billion over 10 years in revenues from the lowering of tariffs and

duties. The administration has proposed funding to compensate, but the Congressional Budget Office and others estimate the shortfall at \$2-4 billion.

The White House has also asked Congress for a seven-year extension to the fast track negotiating authority. Under this authority, once these treaties are finalized by the negotiators, Congress can either ratify or not ratify, but cannot add amendments to the final pact.

Crime bill nears final passage

House and Senate negotiators on July 28 agreed on a \$33.2 billion crime bill. The legislation would put 100,000 more police on the streets, imprison three-time felons for life, ban assault-style weapons, and expand the scope of the death penalty over the next five years.

The measure was reported out of committee as the White House assured the Congressional Black Caucus that it would order federal prosecutors to consider race in death penalty cases in exchange for their votes for the bill. The caucus supported a "racial justice" clause in the original crime bill, which would allow death-row defendants to contest their sentences based on statistics indicating racial inequity in death penalty cases. But the crime bill was stalled because of a threatened Senate filibuster over that provision.

A ban on 19 types of semi-automatic assault weapons was included in the bill. Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.) said the gun ban might kill the entire bill by prompting a filibuster in the Senate. The Senate had included the ban as part of its version of the bill, while the House passed it as a

separate bill by a two-vote margin in May. Numerous Republicans said that they would vote against the bill because of the inclusion of the gun ban.

The crime bill also includes the controversial "three strikes and you're out" mandatory life sentence after three convictions for violent crimes. It also authorizes \$30 billion to hire more police, build more prisons and boot camps, and fund crime prevention programs.

Funds cut for teaching homosexual lifestyles

On Aug. 1, the Senate voted 63-36 to cut off federal funds to any school district that teaches acceptance of homosexuality as a lifestyle. The proposal by Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Robert Smith (R-N.H.) came during debate on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides \$12.5 billion in federal funds to the nation's public schools. The measure would cut funding to districts that carry out programming "that has either the purpose or effect of encouraging or supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative." The House included a similar amendment in its version of the bill.

Some school districts teach acceptance of homosexuality in social studies or sex education programs. Some books which have been written for this curricula, like *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, depict lesbian and homosexual couples in family settings with children.

Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) offered an amendment that would forbid schools from using federal dollars for programs that "promote or encourage sexual activity" of any kind, in an attempt to mollify the homosexual lobby.