

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Space station gets Senate funding okay

The Senate approved \$2.1 billion on Aug. 3 to continue work to put a U.S. space station in orbit around the Earth by the year 2002. The action came on a 64-36 vote rejecting an amendment by Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) to a National Aeronautics and Space Administration appropriations bill; the amendment would have killed the space station.

Bumpers's motivation of his amendment reached new lows of theatrics, as he lamented that no one would listen to him and would just vote the way they wanted to anyway. He yelled that there was absolutely *no* crystal that could be grown in space any better than on Earth. He quoted from anti-science ideologue Robert Park, who heads the Washington office of the American Physical Society, as proof that "scientists" are against the space station. Bumpers claimed that the space station was a "turkey" that was too expensive and did not provide enough benefits to justify its construction.

Supporters said the station was needed to continue space exploration and research and to keep the United States ahead in technology. "The space station represents a new frontier, an opportunity and challenge for the United States and the whole world," said former astronaut John Glenn (D-Ohio).

Freshman Robert Bennett (R-Utah) stated that the station was a fitting commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the first manned landing on the Moon. He said that he had learned while serving as the CEO of a company that "if you don't invest in the future, you are unlikely to have one."

President Clinton supports the station, which he ordered redesigned last year in order to save money. It has

been renamed Alpha. Russia recently signed an agreement to join the European, Japanese, and Canadian space agencies as partners with the United States in the station, which has an estimated cost of \$30 billion. NASA said the agreement with Russia would save the United States \$2 billion, although these claims are disputed in a study by the General Accounting Office, the investigating agency of Congress, which said that the agreement might even increase the cost of the station by that amount.

Assembly of the station is expected to begin in 1997 with material for the station carried into orbit by U.S. space vehicles. The House approved funding for the station in July.

Senate demands its say in any invasion of Haiti

The Senate unanimously approved on Aug. 3 a statement to President Clinton authored by Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), saying that the U.N. Security Council Resolution on Haiti, passed on Aug. 2 and which calls for the use of "all necessary means" to oust Haiti's military leaders, "does not constitute authorization for the deployment of United States Armed Forces under the Constitution of the United States or pursuant to the War Powers Resolution." The non-binding "sense of the Senate" resolution passed by a vote of 100-0.

Dole accused President Clinton of seeking U.N. approval for an invasion of Haiti but rejecting calls for prior approval by Congress. "There should be no mistake: The U.N. action on Sunday does not give the President legal authority to invade Haiti," Dole said.

Several senators said they opposed

restricting Clinton's power to invade Haiti if that becomes necessary, but said that they supported Dole's amendment because it only states the obvious: U.N. approval of a Haiti invasion is not Congress's approval.

Three House members have separately introduced a resolution requiring Clinton to get approval from Congress before sending U.S. forces to Haiti. "If the President can make the case for an invasion of Haiti, and the Congress gives him authority to proceed, the country will be united behind the effort. If, on the other hand, the case can't be made and the support isn't there, it's better to find out ahead of time," said David Skaggs (D-Colo.), a co-sponsor of the resolution.

President Clinton responded that it was "premature" to consider seeking congressional approval for a U.S.-led invasion of Haiti, but did not rule out seeking such backing. "I would welcome the support of the Congress and I hope that I will have it," Clinton said in a nationally televised news conference on Aug. 3. However, "like my predecessors in both parties, I have not agreed that I was constitutionally mandated to get it. . . . At this moment, I think we have done all we need to do." As for whether he would seek the approval of Congress, Clinton said, "I don't want to cross that bridge until we come to it."

Health care reform faces GOP filibuster

Senate Republicans have threatened to filibuster in order to throw a monkey wrench into health care reform this year. Conservative Richard Shelby (D-Ala.), who makes a living out of lambasting the Democratic administration, underscored the difficulty

facing Democratic leaders when he declared he would back a filibuster.

Clinton made health care for all Americans the centerpiece of his domestic agenda, but his proposal ran into roadblocks, prompting Democratic congressional leaders to revamp it.

The Senate opened what promises to be a heated debate on Aug. 8. The proposal at center stage is a compromise offered by Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) which aims to provide insurance coverage to 95% of Americans by the year 2000 through voluntary measures, subsidies, and incentives. A requirement that employers contribute to insurance costs could be added in the year 2002. The Mitchell plan aims to meet its goal through insurance market reforms, and would create new government subsidies to provide children and pregnant women with insurance and help low-income families and unemployed workers buy insurance.

If those steps fall short of covering 95% of the population, then a standby requirement that employers pay 50% of workers' insurance would be put into effect in those states that fell short of the target.

The House is considering a separate bill that would require employers to pay 80% of workers' insurance costs and would expand the federal Medicare program as an option for the uninsured.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) on Aug. 8 threw the first obstacle in the way of the Democratic leadership, offering a non-binding amendment to a separate bill that would force the Senate to go on record in favor of a year's delay on health reform. An angry Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) said Helms's initiative would be a "death sentence" for families unable to obtain insurance.

Although the Republican leadership has not formally called for a filibuster, Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who doesn't hide his presidential ambitions, made clear he favors a filibuster if other tactics, including his bid to strip four proposed taxes on insurance, fail to stop the Democratic plan. "I will do anything I can do within the rules of the Senate to prevent the government from taking over health care," Gramm blustered.

Integral Fast Reactor killed in conference

The Integral Fast Reactor was killed in conference on Aug. 4 when Senate and House conferees approved \$83.8 million for the IFR in the Department of Energy appropriations bill for the termination of the project.

The IFR, an advanced liquid metal reactor, is designed to use a variety of nuclear fuels, including weapons materials such as plutonium or the spent fuel from other nuclear reactors, in a closed cycle which reprocesses and reuses its own spent fuel.

The House had approved funds to terminate IFR, while the Senate had approved funds to continue the IFR research at Argonne National Laboratory. The Clinton administration opposed the reactor, arguing that it was counter to their nonproliferation goals. Some opponents argued that the IFR is a "breeder" reactor, while others claimed that it is a waste of money, and claimed that killing the project would save \$2.9 billion.

IFR supporters say that this technology, which is very close to completing its research goals, will address the issues of proliferation and nuclear waste by providing another disposal option. There is no savings for next

year's budget: The same funds which would have gone to continuing the program are now earmarked to terminate it.

Department of Energy says ITER is priority

The Department of Energy's number-one priority is the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), Anne Davies, associate director for fusion energy at DOE, told the House Subcommittee on Energy on Aug. 2. ITER is being planned as a cooperative program among the United States, Japan, the European Union, and Russia.

Davies reported that the design outline has been completed. She noted that the future demonstration fusion plant would not be a scaled-up ITER. Such an approach would not maximize the potential of the tokamak concept, Davies explained. This is the role of the planned Tokamak Physics Experiment (TPX). Ron Davidson, director of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory where TPX is to be built, testified that TPX will develop the scientific basis for the economic operation of tokamaks. TPX is being designed to address physics issues and test various modes of tokamak operation which will hopefully lead to more compact future fusion reactors.

Rep. Dick Swett (D-N.H.), whose amendment to the DOE appropriations bill to kill TPX was defeated on June 14, asked Davies what would happen if ITER didn't come to fruition. Davies responded that the DOE is committed to making ITER work and so are our partners. But should it fail, the time scale for fusion development would slide way out. If the program doesn't move ahead in 1995, there will be significant layoffs, she added.