

Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

Debt relief for Jordan gets Senate okay

The Senate approved by a vote of 88-12 and sent to President Clinton on Aug. 10, a \$13.8 billion Foreign Operations bill providing up to \$220 million in debt relief for Jordan and \$50 million in emergency aid for Rwandan refugees.

The House approved the bill the week before by a vote of 341-85. The bill earmarks \$99 million this year, and allows up to \$220 million overall in debt relief for Jordan—proposed by the Clinton administration following King Hussein's July 25 agreement with Israel at the White House to end the 46-year-old state of war between the two nations.

The Clinton administration promised to forgive Jordan's \$700 million debt to the United States in return for the peace move, but Congress is unlikely to approve more of the package without progress on a Jordan-Israel peace accord.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) called the debt relief a "payoff," and said that the U.S. public will eventually ask, "Can we afford peace in the Middle East?" Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) the bill's floor manager, responded, "I feel we do have a stake in bringing about a lasting peace in the Middle East."

Starr appointment 'political,' Dems charge

Democrats in Congress reacted angrily on Aug. 8 to the surprise appointment of former Bush Solicitor General Kenneth Starr to be the special counsel investigating alleged wrongdoing by the Clintons in the Whitewater affair.

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) called on Starr to decline the appointment, "on behalf of your own credibility." He listed the Republican

credentials of presiding judge David Sentelle, one of the three judges who appointed Starr to replace Robert Fiske, including that Sentelle was the "judicial protector of Oliver North." Metzenbaum accused Sentelle of acting on the advice of neo-conservative Floyd Brown, "the man who gave us the Willie Horton ad." "This move screams politics," Metzenbaum said. "How can Mr. Starr take this job and expect to appear impartial with all this background noise?"

Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.) said it is "bizarre, if not downright partisan, for a U.S. Court of Appeals panel, including two Republican judges, to abruptly anoint former Bush administration Solicitor General Kenneth Starr to reinvestigate the Whitewater matter. . . . It is a reasonable conclusion, that the appointment of Judge Starr as new special prosecutor has the appearance of a calculated move to create controversy, to harass the President, to draw this matter out forever, and to wring every conceivable drop of partisan gain out of the Whitewater affair."

Lift arms embargo on Bosnia, Senate affirms

On Aug. 11, the Senate approved two amendments to the Defense Appropriations bill which provide for lifting the U.N.-imposed arms embargo against Bosnia-Herzegovina. The first, offered by Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), requires the President to terminate the arms embargo by Nov. 15, 1994 "so that the government [of Bosnia-Herzegovina] may exercise its right to self-defense under Article 51 of the United Nations."

Unlike previous proposals offered by Dole, this one contains no provision for providing arms to Bosnia from existing U.S. military stocks.

Dole said that the deadline was added in order to give the U.N. forces in Bosnia time to withdraw.

A second amendment, co-sponsored by Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and George Mitchell (D-Me.), calls on the President to go to the U.N. Security Council by Oct. 15 with a resolution to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia if the Bosnian Serbs do not agree to the partition plan worked out on July 6 and already agreed to by the Bosnian government. The resolution provides that if the Security Council does not vote to lift the embargo, then no U.S. funds may be used to enforce it and the President may consult with the Congress to unilaterally lift it and provide arms and training to the government of Bosnia. Mitchell explained that this was the substance of the agreement worked out in conference committee on the Defense Authorization bill passed in June.

The House version of the bill contains language similar to the Dole amendment, except the Senate provides for a multilateral termination of the embargo. The White House has expressed support for the Mitchell amendment, and President Clinton told Congress in a letter that he intends to introduce a U.N. resolution by the end of October to lift the arms embargo if the Serbs do not accept the peace plan by Oct. 15. The Nunn-Mitchell amendment was approved by a vote of 54-44, and the Dole amendment was approved by a slightly larger majority of 58-42.

Health care proposal hit by GOP, business

The Senate Democrats' health care reform bill is coming under fire from business groups as Republicans press their attack against the bill and proposed tax increases.

The Senate began debate on health care reform on Aug. 9 with a Republican onslaught designed to undermine public support for the measure. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) objected that the bill, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), had 18 new taxes, 50 new bureaucracies, and 175 new requirements for state governments.

Several business groups, including those that have supported Clinton's call for employer-paid health benefits, are upset with provisions they say will increase their costs of providing insurance to workers. "The decision has already been made that the Mitchell bill is unacceptable and the plug on it in its current form should be pulled," said Jim Klein of the Association of Private Pension and Welfare Plans.

MFN for China backed by House

On Aug. 9, the House approved H.R. 4590, the United States-China Act of 1994, which backed the Clinton administration's extension of Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status for China. The bill contained some additional items aimed at promoting human rights in China. Earlier, the House rejected by a vote of 75-356 a joint resolution disapproving the renewal of MFN for China.

The bill that was finally approved was a substitute offered by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.). The original amendment, sponsored by Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), called for revoking MFN status on goods produced by Chinese state-owned enterprises and the People's Liberation Army, and prohibiting in the future the extension of non-discriminatory treatment for such goods.

The Hamilton measure effectively decouples the annual renewal of MFN

from human rights policy. Hamilton told the House that "passage of the Pelosi bill would bring heavy costs but few benefits." Hamilton also argued that "China could undermine our policy in North Korea, block sanctions resolutions, and increase tensions with Taiwan." On the economic side, he said, "if we denied MFN treatment for half of its exports to the United States, China would surely retaliate against United States exporters. Our exports would plummet. Our trade deficit would soar."

Phil Crane (R-Ill.) supported the Hamilton approach. He said that "conditioning the annual renewal of MFN on human rights objectives is a foreign policy stick that failed to produce the progress which we all seek from the Communist Chinese government. This approach, debated in the House every year since 1990, is counterproductive to our goals of fostering the growth of freedom and democracy in that nation."

The Hamilton substitute was approved by a vote of 280-152, and an attempt by Pelosi to resubstitute her original bill was defeated by an almost identical vote of 158-270.

Tokamak shortchanged in conference decision

A Senate and House conference on appropriations for the Department of Energy settled on \$42 million for the Tokamak Physics Experiment (TPX) program for fiscal year 1995, far less than the \$67 million requested by the Clinton administration.

The TPX is the next major U.S. magnetic fusion facility being planned at Princeton University. It is intended to address issues in plasma physics and tokamak operations which may lead to more compact and efficient fusion reactors.

The House had approved the full \$67 million and construction authorization for the project. However, the Senate had reduced funding to \$28 million, limiting TPX to continuation of preliminary design. The \$42 million compromise limits TPX to design work, but allows for industry participation.

Intelligence reform to enhance FBI authority

The Senate on Aug. 12 added an amendment on counterintelligence reform sponsored by Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) and John Warner (R-Va.), to the 1995 Intelligence Authorization bill.

The amendment would make the FBI the sole agency responsible for counterintelligence investigations that lead to criminal prosecutions. It requires the CIA and other relevant agencies to cooperate fully with the FBI. Other provisions include setting standards for access to classified information, and giving the FBI access to credit and travel records of targets of investigation.

Another provision requires that physical searches for intelligence purposes can only be carried out with a court order. Currently, searches are carried out with the approval of the Attorney General. DeConcini said that the committee "does not believe this arrangement provides adequate protection for the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens."

"The Ames interview further convinced me that we can do a better job in the counterintelligence area. We need to have one agency clearly in charge of investigations, an agency with trained investigators," DeConcini said. The legislation "is going to place the best criminal investigators that we have available to the federal government into this process at the very earliest point."