

Congressional Calendar

Energy Mobilization Board meanders through Congress

The Energy Mobilization Board proposed by President Carter as part of his July initiative on synthetic fuels is under consideration by both Senate and House committees this week. The Mobilization Board is designed to speed development of synthetic fuel plants and other low-yield energy boondoggles, such as gasohol. A key issue which has not been resolved in either House is whether a waiver on state and local laws should be included to allow the Board to assure construction of facilities after it has been designated a priority project.

The House Interior subcommittee on energy and environment, headed by Rep. Morris Udall (D-Ariz.) reports that HR-4985 has passed out of the committee without the inclusion of the waiver provision. Committee staff members report that they expect speedier implementation of the priority projects if the states and localities have a voice in the program. Reportedly, the National Governor's Conference and Conference of Mayors are concerned that a bad precedent would be set if the federal government could preempt local and state laws. Undoubtedly subcommittee Chairman Udall, a staunch environmentalist, has no intention of interfering with the environmental legislation on the state or local level.

The House Commerce Committee reported their bill out of committee on Sept. 12, with a waiver on state and local laws. Their bill includes the synfuels proposals based on the President's "fast track" program. It is now in the Rules Committee to be scheduled for House action.

Action on the Senate side includes initial reports from Senator Henry Jackson's Energy Committee, that authority to waive the laws will not be included in their bill. Jackson said that a majority of the committee is opposed to such an action and that they will work on a proposal close to what the administration wants, allowing the board to intervene if local agencies do not meet deadlines imposed for reaching decisions.

Congressional sources report that the panoply of Senate and House bills for the Mobilization Board may be on the floor in a couple of weeks.

Gas rationing plan agreed to

A House-Senate conference committee reached agreement on Sept. 18 for a gasoline rationing plan. Leaders of the committee believe the new version will be able to pass both houses and an administration official attending the meeting said he thought the White House would accept the compromise.

The Committee voted to give

Congress the power to reject a rationing scheme once it is submitted by the President, which could in turn be vetoed by the President. Only a two-thirds vote by Congress could then override the veto. The compromise proposal also allows Congress to veto actual implementation of a rationing plan. In order for a rationing plan to be imposed, the bill states, there would have to be a 20 percent decrease in gasoline supplies, although the President could ask for a waiver on this. Now both houses of Congress have to approve the compromise proposal.

Senate recommends defense budget increase

By a vote of 55 to 42, the Senate voted Sept. 19 to permit annual increases of 5 percent after inflation in the 1981 and 1982 Defense budgets. The vote came on the second concurrent budget resolution and is not binding. This increase will have to be actually mandated in 1981 and 1982 fiscal year budget authorizations and appropriations.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss.), who is hardly known as a dove, voted against the measure and suggested that it was more in response to the current turmoil over "Soviet troops in Cuba" than any real need for a \$25 billion increase in Defense spending. "These days will pass and this matter we're con-

cerned about now, will pass," Stennis said.

Democrats who have been most vocal in their objections to a Soviet presence in Cuba such as Henry Jackson (Wash.), Richard Stone (Fla), Robert Byrd (D-West Va.), and Daniel Moynihan (N.Y.) voted for the measure. So did Senator Edward Kennedy who is eyeing positions for the presidential race.

Support for paraquat use?

Representative Lester Wolfe, chairman of the House Select Committee on Drug Abuse, called for the "revision" of the controversial Percy amendment while speaking before the Senate Subcommittee on Criminal Justice. Sen. Percy's (R-III) amendment seeks to permanently cut off funding to all Third World countries whose drug eradication programs involve the highly effective method of aerial herbicide spraying.

The strongest statement yet from a congressman against the Percy measure, Wolfe's recommendation comes as Secretary of State Vance is deciding whether the Percy amendment will be implemented.

Representative Wolfe questioned the "supporting data regarding the health effects" of paraquat-sprayed marijuana, which he called "incomplete and misleading." Wolfe further explained that a

study group of scientists and representatives from the United Nations and the U.S. Department of Agriculture "recently found that marijuana sprayed with paraquat did no harm to humans."

"In fact, paraquat was determined by that group to be one of only a handful of herbicides that was safe," he said.

"I have requested that Secretary Harris of Health Education and Welfare re-examine the evidence." His request could take the final decision on the use of paraquat out of Vance's hands for the moment. He continued, "I understand that the executive branch is proposing a revision of the Percy amendment. "The degree of harm to the abuser, not users, if there is any, must be balanced against our public and national interest."

Drug crackdown possible

Meanwhile, Senator Sam Nunn, Chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, has just carried out a complete staff reorganization, apparently to "professionalize" and "tighten up" the investigative work of the subcommittee on narcotics trafficking, organized crime, and labor racketeering.

Commentators are not yet certain whether his efforts signal a serious attempt to track the interna-

tional network known as "Dope Inc." responsible for the multibillion narcotics racket, or whether the reorganization will result in the heavy handed "investigatory" tactics of Bobby Kennedy's Department of Justice in his "Get Hoffa" era.

A new staff director of the subcommittee, Marty Steinberg, has a background which should qualify him as more than familiar with top personnel in the Dope Inc. family. Steinberg was a prosecutor with the Organized Crime Strike Force in Buffalo, N.Y. the base of the mob-linked Jacobs family. As well, he was with the Organized Crime Strike Force in Miami, a major narcotics entry point into the United States as well as the home of Resorts International's Meyer Lansky. Steinberg has brought his own staff with him from Miami. The new staff seems to be familiar with the drug trade's critical component, money laundering, through offshore banking shells in Cayman Islands and elsewhere.

The staff reorganization comes at the same time that Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del) began hearings on narcotics in the Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on Criminal Laws. A Biden staffer stated that this round of hearings is only the opening shot of a Biden-Nunn coordinated effort on international narcotics trafficking.

—Barbara Dreyfuss and Susan Kokinda