

Congressional Calendar by Barbara Dreyfuss and Susan Kokinda

Subcommittee investigating Billy Carter meets

The special Senate subcommittee investigating the facts related to Billy Carter's ties to Libya met twice before the Senate recessed for the Democratic Party Convention. The largely background hearings were with lower-level government officials.

Testifying Aug. 4, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Newsome revealed that the White House decision to use Billy Carter and his Libyan contacts as mediators with the Khomeini regime did not have State Department approval, which Newsome said did not know about the decision.

On Aug. 6 the subcommittee heard from Justice Department and GAO officials, including Associate Deputy Attorney General Robert Keuch, who testified about widespread resistance to and evasion of the foreign agents registration laws.

The subcommittee will resume hearings after the recess, when it will have the assistance of a special counsel, James Neal, a former Watergate special prosecutor who helped investigate the late Teamster leader James Hoffa.

Tsongas fusion bill draws scientists' criticisms

Hearings in the Energy Research and Development Subcommittee of the Senate Energy Committee on Sen. Paul Tsongas' (D-Mass.) fusion legislation Aug. 5 turned into a roundtable discussion between subcommittee staff and fusion laboratory directors during which the scientists aired serious concerns

about the legislation. Because of the heavy schedule of floor votes, no senators could be present to take formal testimony from the laboratory directors; instead, the scientists engaged in a detailed dialogue with staff members who wrote the bill.

The Tsongas legislation contains no additional funding for fiscal 1981 for the fusion program, and seeks only to establish the political mandate for the program this year.

Three major criticisms were raised around the bill. First, the Tsongas legislation, unlike Rep. Mike McCormack's (D-Wash.) fusion bill, sets the year 2005 as the target date for a commercial fusion reactor, while McCormack's bill posits the year 2000 as an outside date and gears its program to achieving commercialization by 1995. The scientists stressed that the only thing obstructing fusion development is funding, and the 2005 date might mean an actual delay in the achievement of the goals.

Second, the laboratory directors argued that the fusion budget could easily absorb a twofold increase in funding over the next five years without any waste. The Tsongas bill mandates that the fusion budget be doubled over a period of 10 years.

Finally, the lab directors expressed deep concern over the establishment of an elaborate system of advisory committees attached to individual laboratories. The fusion research directors felt that the legislation gives those committees more than an advisory role, could make the committee decisions binding, and could overrule the decisions of laboratory directors.

Dr. Melvin Gottlieb, director of

the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory fusion program, where groundbreaking results in U.S. fusion research have been achieved, stated, "We have an advisory committee now and it has played a very useful role, but we still make the decisions as to whether to take the advice or not take it."

Others participating in the informal hearings were the directors of the fusion programs at Lawrence Livermore, MIT, Oak Ridge, and General Atomic, and Dr. Ed Kintner, director of the Office of Fusion Energy at the Department of Energy. On the first day of the hearings, July 28, Tsongas startled the participants by saying that he had introduced his bill as an alternative to the Clinch River breeder reactor. Most Senators, especially Republicans, will refuse to support the legislation if it is termed a replacement for the breeder, as Tsongas knows, and there has been speculation that he introduced his bill to sabotage McCormack's effort.

Appropriations Ctte. sets budget allocations

Sen. Warren Magnuson (D-Wash.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Senate Budget Committee chairman Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) and Sen. Milton Young (R-N.D.) met Aug. 4 and agreed on a plan to allocate \$420 billion of the 1981 budget among the 13 subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee for markup. The Senators have been circulating their proposal among the committee members and a number of them have requested a meeting of the whole committee after the recess for the Democratic Party

Convention, in order to discuss the proposals for dividing up the 1981 budget.

Senator Magnuson is reported to have originally wanted to transfer \$4 billion from defense spending to domestic spending. However, Senator Hollings disagreed and after consultations an agreement was apparently reached to return \$3.7 billion to the defense subcommittee allocation, bringing it to a total of \$146.8 billion.

In the process, other allocations were cut, including \$400 million from the agriculture subcommittee. Sen. Eagleton (D-Mo.), chairman of the subcommittee, warned against the cuts in agriculture, pointing out that the proposed \$19.3 billion would be \$233 million less than the House proposed. He added that 45 Senators had called for increasing the agriculture total by \$473 million.

Automakers win delay in safety requirements

A House-Senate conference committee agreed on July 31 on a bill that would postpone the mandatory inclusion of either airbags or automatic seatbelts in automobiles until 1983. If approved now by both the House and Senate, five of the major auto manufacturers will have to include such restraints in their small cars by 1983, and in their medium and large cars by 1984. The affected automakers are Ford, General Motors, Toyota, Datsun and Volkswagen.

Existing law requires that all auto manufacturers include these restraints in large cars by 1982, in medium cars by 1983 and small cars by 1984. Under the new bill, smaller

companies including Chrysler and American Motors would still have to meet that deadline. The compromise bill that just passed the conference committee would reverse the priorities for the large manufacturers, directing them to put the systems in smaller vehicles first. The new bill formally delays action by the auto companies for one more year.

Because auto companies are expected to use the automatic seat belts rather than air bags to fulfill the safety requirements, the compromise requires that airbags be offered as an option on at least one model line by 1983. This would apply only to the larger manufacturers.

Neither the manufacturers nor the environmentalists are happy with the compromise bill. Donald E. Petersen of Ford Motor Company called it "discriminatory." Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety complained, "This gives the auto makers one more year of delay." Sources at Ford Motor Company said that the company is also unhappy with the bill because "it mandates a design standard." Current safety requirements allow automakers to choose how to implement the standards. "There could be all kinds of ramifications," they said.

Attacks on Tenn-Tom waterway escalate

Following the late July Senate subcommittee hearings that tried to build a case for terminating the Tennessee-Tombigbee waterway project, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.), a long-time opponent of the project, has requested a GAO study

to determine how much the government "would save" by immediately killing the project.

In a letter to GAO administrator Elmer Staats, Proxmire raised questions about the waterway's economic benefits, the propriety of a low government interest rate in funding the project, and on the accuracy of projection for coal use of the waterway. He requested that Staats provide answers for the debate on the fiscal 1981 appropriations hearings which will probably take place in September.

A spokesman for Proxmire praised the hearings held on July 25 by the water resources subcommittee of the Environmental and Public Works Committee, chaired by Sen. Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), another Tenn-Tom opponent, which raised questions similar to those outlined in Proxmire's letter. Moynihan just recently became chairman of the water resources subcommittee. In addition, some of the witnesses actually suggested that the Army Corps of Engineers has been dishonest in its projections of benefits created by the waterway, and that they had deceived Congress.

Rep. Tom Bevell (D-Ala.) has refuted these charges against the Army Corps of Engineers in detailed arguments on the House floor during an earlier debate on the Tenn-Tom fiscal 1980 appropriations. Attempts then to kill the project failed.

Capitol Hill observers noted that the one staff member on the subcommittee with a professional civil engineering background, and practical experience in the area of waterways development left the subcommittee.