

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda and Susan Kokinda

Melcher's 'modest proposal' for farm crisis

Sen. John Melcher (D-Mont.) gave a tub-thumping speech to the breakaway Alabama Farm Bureau on St. Patrick's Day, in which he blasted the Reagan administration for destroying America's agricultural and industrial base, while spurring stock-market speculation.

Commenting on how the Reagan "farm program" has destroyed U.S. agricultural exports, and with them, many American farmers, Melcher, a key member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, proffered a modest proposal of his own:

"Reagan likes you," Melcher told his audience. "Reagan likes rebels. You know his attitude—Keep the wheat and export the farmers. Well, the President is ready to start fulfilling his commitment to the policy of exporting farmers and helping the rebels in Nicaragua. . . .

"Instead of sending \$100 million to [the contras], we are going to divide up the \$100 million among 5,000 of you and we'll send some real rebels from Alabama's farms. From Mobile to Managua, we'll get more bang for the buck and we'll kill two birds with one stone—5,000 Alabama farmers exported to Nicaragua and we'll give you each \$20,000 this year—tax-free—and more next year. Just sign up! . . . I would like to go with you, but someone has to stay here with the wheat—and to keep piling up the wheat and all the other stuff we don't export. Then, I can help Ronald Reagan liquidate the next bunch of U.S. farmers he wants to export."

Melcher assailed the administration's economic policy, insisting: "We must tell them that to hold support under the stock market on Wall Street,

there is only a foundation built on sand, unless the basic industries spread across America are sound. And they are not sound—agriculture, minerals and mining, energy-oil-gas-coal, forest products, steel, and transportation are all down and sinking lower.

"Reagan's bunch has to be told that, and the communication has to be of the firm kind, *like communicating with a mule* [emphasis in original]."

Melcher also lashed out at one of his favorite targets, the striped-pants set at the State Department. He repeated a charge he has leveled in the past, that State's policy of "blocking or reducing exports to countries that they think are not marching to their tune," including the Philippines, Mexico, and Kenya, has forced a 26% drop in American agricultural exports.

Marcos 'scandal' targets U.S. politicians

As documents seized from former President Ferdinand Marcos continue to be analysed, there is evidence of "a massive plan to influence U.S. politics" with tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions, according to Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa).

Several of those listed as apparent recipients, including President Ronald Reagan, former President Jimmy Carter, and Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), vigorously deny knowing until the revelations were made that they might have got contributions from Marcos associates.

Contributions listed for as many as nine Democratic officials—all outspoken foes of Marcos—now also target the Reagan administration, although several members of Rep. Steven Solarz's (D-N.Y.)

on Asian and Pacific Affairs have expressed confidence that those cited in the documents may have been unaware of the illegal contributions Marcos might have made.

Senate, House hack away at defense

The Republican-controlled Senate Budget Committee has unceremoniously dumped President Reagan's budget plan for FY1987 into the trashcan.

By a vote of 13-9, the committee March 19 approved its own alternative plan, which would hike taxes by more than \$18 billion, freeze most domestic programs, and gouge the defense budget beyond recognition.

The Budget Committee plan, approved by a majority of Democrats and Republicans, was the result of week-long negotiations between chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) and ranking Democrat Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.).

proposed a budget that would cut defense by \$21 billion, but to meet demands from Chiles and other Democrats, agreed in the end to a \$25 billion cut—worse than a freeze.

Chiles specifically asserted that the magnitude of budget cuts he was seeking would "drive the kind of reform we're looking for"—an allusion to the proposals emanating from the Packard Commission, the Senate Armed Services Committee, and elsewhere, to restructure the Pentagon so that budgetary considerations are the number-one priority, and the defense of the country comes in, at best, a poor second.

Given that Domenici had previously opposed a defense-spending freeze, his acceptance of such sharp

cuts, is a sure sign that the Pentagon budget will face even rougher handling as the budget process unfolds. Indeed, liberal press outlets like the *Washington Post* exulted that Domenici's shift means that Reagan's defense budget is going to be butchered. And the House Budget Committee chairman hailed Domenici's alternative as "refreshing," explaining that it proves that even Republicans are willing to "stand up" to the White House on the defense issue.

The Budget panel's action occurred just days after the full House voted down the administration's spending plan, by a margin of 312-12, with most Republicans abstaining. Although the vote was mostly ceremonial, as the Democrats simply introduced it "as is" and pushed through a yes or no vote, it was taken as yet another indicator that Congress intends to make a drastic overhaul in the President's overall budget.

House armed services staff warns of troop pull-out

Members of the House Armed Services Committee have been bluntly informed that a proposal to cut \$50 billion from the defense budget could result in such drastic measures as a total American troop pull-out from South Korea, a massive reduction of U.S. soldiers stationed in Western Europe, and the cancellation of entire weapons systems.

The plan, now under consideration by the House Budget Committee, was the subject of an unusual briefing which staffers of the Armed Services Committee gave to committee members March 18.

The potential cuts "could severely jeopardize national security," staffer

Russell Murray told the committee. While the \$50 billion in reductions being discussed by the Budget Committee "could severely jeopardize national security," he said, even deeper cuts could occur if Gramm-Rudman's automatic-cuts provisions are invoked. "We'd have to eliminate 500,000 American troops altogether, if that happens," Murray said in an interview.

Murray claimed that the briefing was intended to provide options, not recommendations to committee members. But it remains that Aspin, together with Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), are the leaders of the gang in Congress who want to sever the United States from its allies, and who have seized upon the alleged need for budget reductions to justify defense cutbacks that would necessitate removing the American military presence from Europe and elsewhere.

Senate sources have pointed to the fact that Carole Hansen, a long-time associate of U.S.-Europe decoupler Zbigniew Brzezinski, has recently taken over as staff director of the Senate's European affairs subcommittee, as an omen that decoupling will soon emerge as a major issue on the Hill.

Hollings probes White House pressure on NASA

Charging that White House pressure was responsible for the fatal decision to launch the shuttle Challenger Jan. 28, Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) has demanded that the White House produce the telephone logs of nine presidential assistants for the time period Jan. 20 through noon, Jan. 28.

"It is important the White House undergo the same scrutiny in this matter NASA is undergoing," said Holl-

ings, in a letter to White House counsel Fred Fielding.

"Rumors of White House involvement have persisted too long," Hollings wrote. "The time has come to be more open and put this issue to rest once and for all."

Among the logs requested are those belonging to chief of staff Donald Regan, communications director Pat Buchanan, and chief White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

According to rumors circulating in Washington, Don Regan placed a call to NASA on Jan. 26, demanding that the Shuttle launch take place in time for it to be featured on the President's State of the Union message, which had been originally scheduled for Jan. 28. Both Regan and the President have denied that any White House pressure was brought to bear on NASA.

Reagan loses first round on Contras

The House of Representatives handed President Reagan a stinging political defeat March 20, when it voted 222-210 against the administration's \$100 million aid package for the "contras" in Nicaragua. Sixteen Republicans joined 206 Democrats to sink the President's proposal, after bitter debate on the floor.

The defeat came despite intense lobbying by the White House and the President, and a last-minute compromise, whereby Reagan agreed to put the funds in escrow for 90 days, to allow for further negotiations between the contras and the Nicaraguan government.

The Senate will be voting on the issue during the last week in March, and a second vote will be taken in the House in April.