Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Pepper's clout thwarts Wall Street

Wall Street's heavy-handed pressure to put a $4 billion cut in Social Security benefits on the negotiating table of the "budget summit" talks was thwarted by the efforts of an 87-year-old Congressman.

As the deficit-reduction talks moved into their final hours, it appeared that Rep. Claude Pepper (D-Fla.)
savage assault against the fixed incomes of 39 million elderly and disabled Americans.

President Reagan said at the outset of the negotiations, which began the day after the Oct. 19 stock market crash, that "everything was on the table except Social Security."

But, as reported in this column last week, the Wall Street crowd, led by Lehman Brothers' Peter Peterson, immediately started a drum beat to insist that the temperamental mood of the market would require a showing of political will in Washington capable of carrying out the unpopular task of slashing Social Security.

The Wall Street moguls deployed their attack dogs in the White House press corps to lead the charge against Reagan's refusal to put Social Security on the bargaining table, led by ABC's Sam Donaldson.

As the deadlocked budget talks went into the final week before the merciless axe of the Gramm-Rudman automatic sequestration deadline Nov. 20, it looked like the White House was going to cave in on the Social Security question. That is, until Pepper held a press conference in absentia at the Capitol Nov. 16. The head of the House Rules Committee wasn't able to attend the press conference in person, but a video tape of a brief message from the congressman was played by leaders of a coalition of pensioner and senior citizens groups called "Save Our Security" (SOS).

Pepper said on the tape that if any Social Security cut were put into the budget reduction package, including even a delay in the cost of living adjustment (COLA)
would use his clout as the chairman of the Rules Committee to demand a separate roll-call vote on the House floor on the Social Security cut.

This announcement, combined with a reported 8 million letters and telegrams to Congress organized by the SOS lobby, was apparently all it took. The prospect of being put on the record in favor of a Social Security cut is something that few elected officials dare face. After all, almost all of the 39 million Americans on Social Security vote.

The voices of Wall Street and their paid mouths in Congress and the media were quickly silenced. Rep. Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.),
the day said he planned to storm in on the President to demand a Social Security cut, slinked in and out of the White House with other Republican legislators the next morning without even talking to reporters.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater later confirmed that neither Boschwitz nor anyone else in the delegation even raised the Social Security issue in their meeting with Reagan.

When I asked Fitzwater what Reagan thought of Pepper's threat, he said, "Clearly, political reality drives both sides to be very wary of any change in entitlements, and particularly Social Security."

However, while it looked like a victory had been achieved for Pepper and the SOS against Wall Street's attack on the elderly, it was only a holding action, at best. The budget compromise was certain to include further deep bites out of Medicare, and many other lethal cuts.

Murderous plans for health care

Arthur Anderson and Co. and the American College of Health Care Executives released a study on trends in the health care industry at the Capitol in mid-November. It was one of the most explicit admissions to date of plans to murder millions of Americans in the name of cost-benefit considerations.

The study, entitled "The Future of Health Care: Challenges and Choices," is based on a survey of 1,600 "experts," and opened its summary of findings with the brazen statement that "dollar concerns will be the driving force behind America's health care agenda." "Policy will be dictated primarily by money."

As a result of this, the report found, trends will include: 1)
by market incentives, 2)
10% of hospitals, 3)
indigent care costs to hospitals, 4) covert rationing of care as funds are limited for medical technology, and 5) limits to care based on factors such as age and ability to pay.

The most crucial medical ethics issues will stem from concern over limited resources, the report said, including the rationing of services and euthanasia (i.e., "right to die").

"Americans will not accept rationing of health care. . . . Despite this, access to care will be limited by factors of age and ability to pay. Health care will be limited for the terminally ill, and organ transplants limited to those who can afford it," the report predicted.

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